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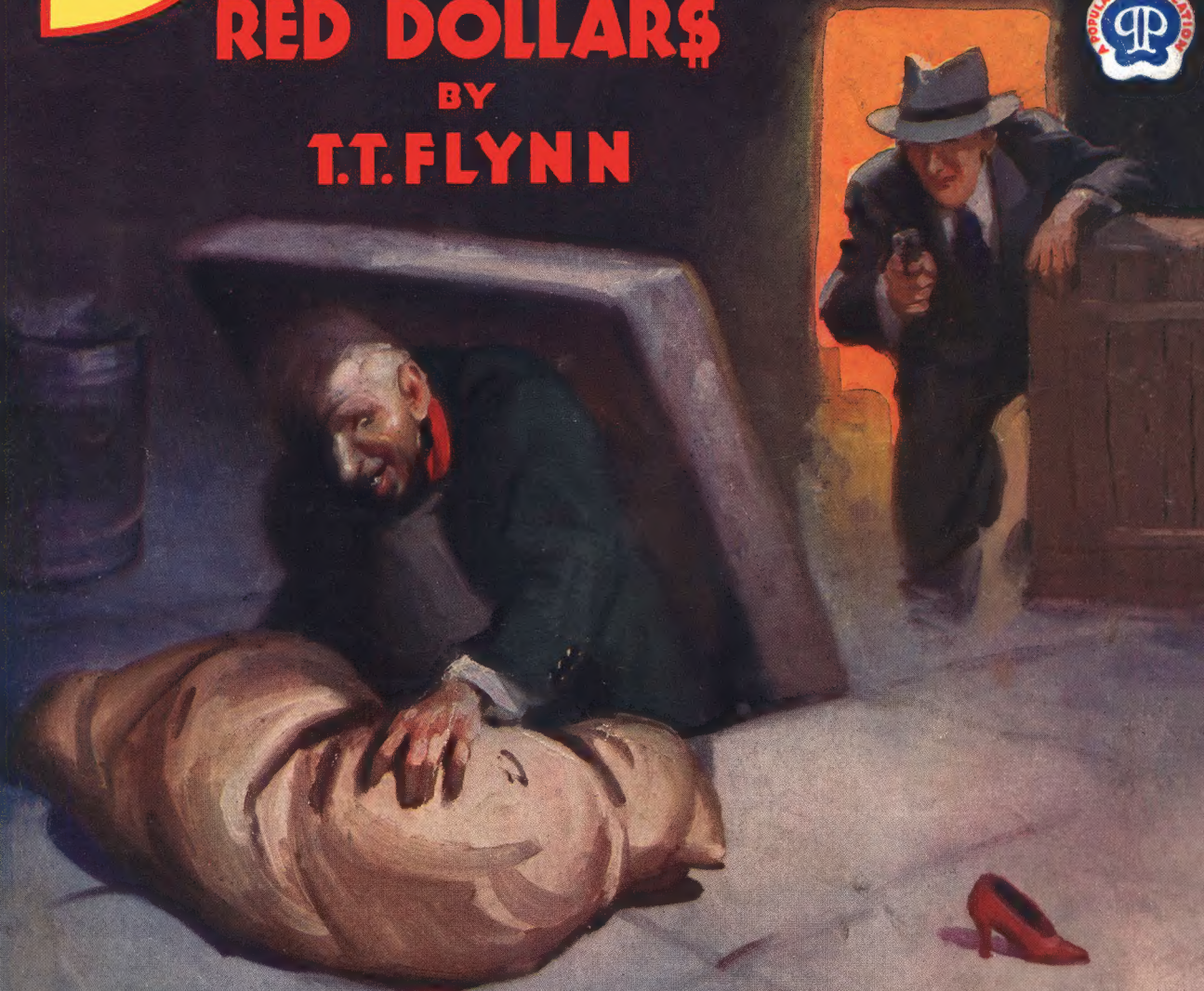
DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

TWICE
A MONTH

RED DOLLAR\$
BY
T.T. FLYNN



DECEMBER 1ST DIME 10¢ DETECTIVE MAGAZINE 10¢



BLOOD ON THE CURTAIN
A MARTY DAY NOVEL
CARROLL JOHN DALY

ALSO

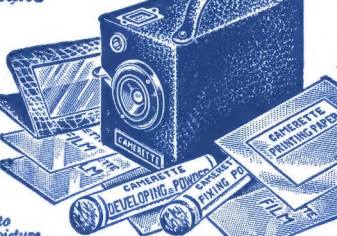
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10 DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

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EVERY STORY NEW

Vol. 9 CONTENTS for DECEMBER 1st, 1933 No. 2

SMASHING NOVEL-LENGTH ACTION THRILLER

Gasp in horror at the

Blood on the Curtain—A Marty Day Story.....Carroll John Daly 8
And the death that lurked behind it to tangle the Reckoner's emissary in an alibi-proof murder frame.

COMPLETE DETECTIVE NOVELETTE

Open your eyes to the

Winking Death.....Allan Vaughan Elston 48
That blazoned a killer's crime for the world to read in lights.

GRIPPING MASTER MYSTERY NOVEL

Gamble against danger with

Red Dollars.....T. T. Flynn 73
For stakes—crimson-spattered bank notes that purchase death in the marts of crimeland.

SHORT MIDNIGHT TERROR TALE

Go

Wrapped for Murder.....Oscar Schisgall 113
Where ghoulish hands snatch the unwary to the brink of the grave.

Now meet an exponent of

The "Clue" Story.....Editor 124
DIME DETECTIVE'S newest baffle-master. We're sure you'll like him.

Cover—"He Dragged the Bag Toward the Hole".....William Reusswig
From "Wrapped for Murder."

Issued the First and Fifteenth of Every Month

Watch for the December 15th Issue On the Newsstands November 15th

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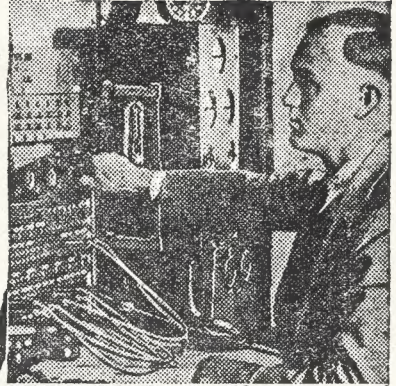
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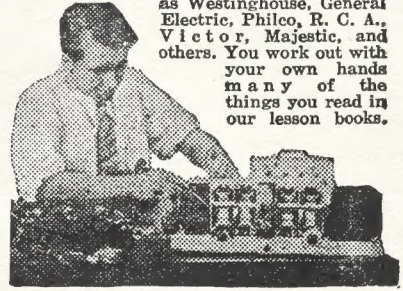
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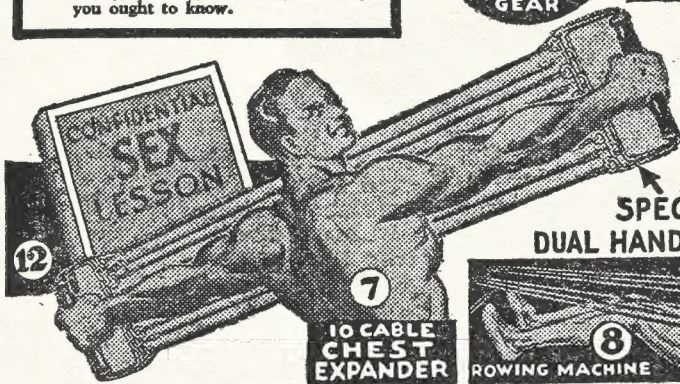
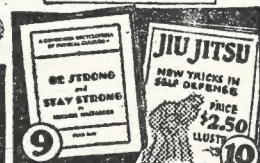
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The New York Times

LARGE WAISTLINE HELD HEALTH PERIL

Middle-Aged Man Who Keeps His Small Lives Longer, Government Bureau Says.

FIGURES SHOW DIRECT LINK

Overweight People Have Worst of It in Mortality Tables Covering 15 Causes.

WASHINGTON, Aug. 24 (AP).—The man who keeps his waistline small when he reaches middle age is the most likely to win the race for health, is the conclusion drawn from a new study of the relation of weight to physical defects just published by the Public Health Service. "By the time that middle age is reached, these figures indicate, it is a definite advantage to be under the average weight for height," says the report.

It also shows "a great excess of mortality among overweight persons, whatever the age, and also an excess among young adult underweight persons."

The conclusions are drawn from records of more than 3,000 men from 1909 to 1928, showing the ratio of actual deaths to expected mortality, according to different weight groups. In the following table, figures below 100 indicate less than the expected death rate; those above 100 indicate more than the expected death rate:

Weight Class.	Age Group.			50 and Over.
	20-29.	30-39.	40-49.	
25 pounds or more underweight—				
10 to 20 lbs.	118	105	83	77
5 lbs. under to 5 lbs. overweight—	101	94	76	85
10 to 20 pounds overweight	92	84	87	92
25 to 45 pounds overweight	99	88	94	90
50 lbs. or more overweight	113	123	125	119
163	143	144	130	

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● So many of our customers are delighted with the wonderful results obtained with the Weil Belt that we want you to TRY IT FOR TEN DAYS AT OUR EXPENSE!

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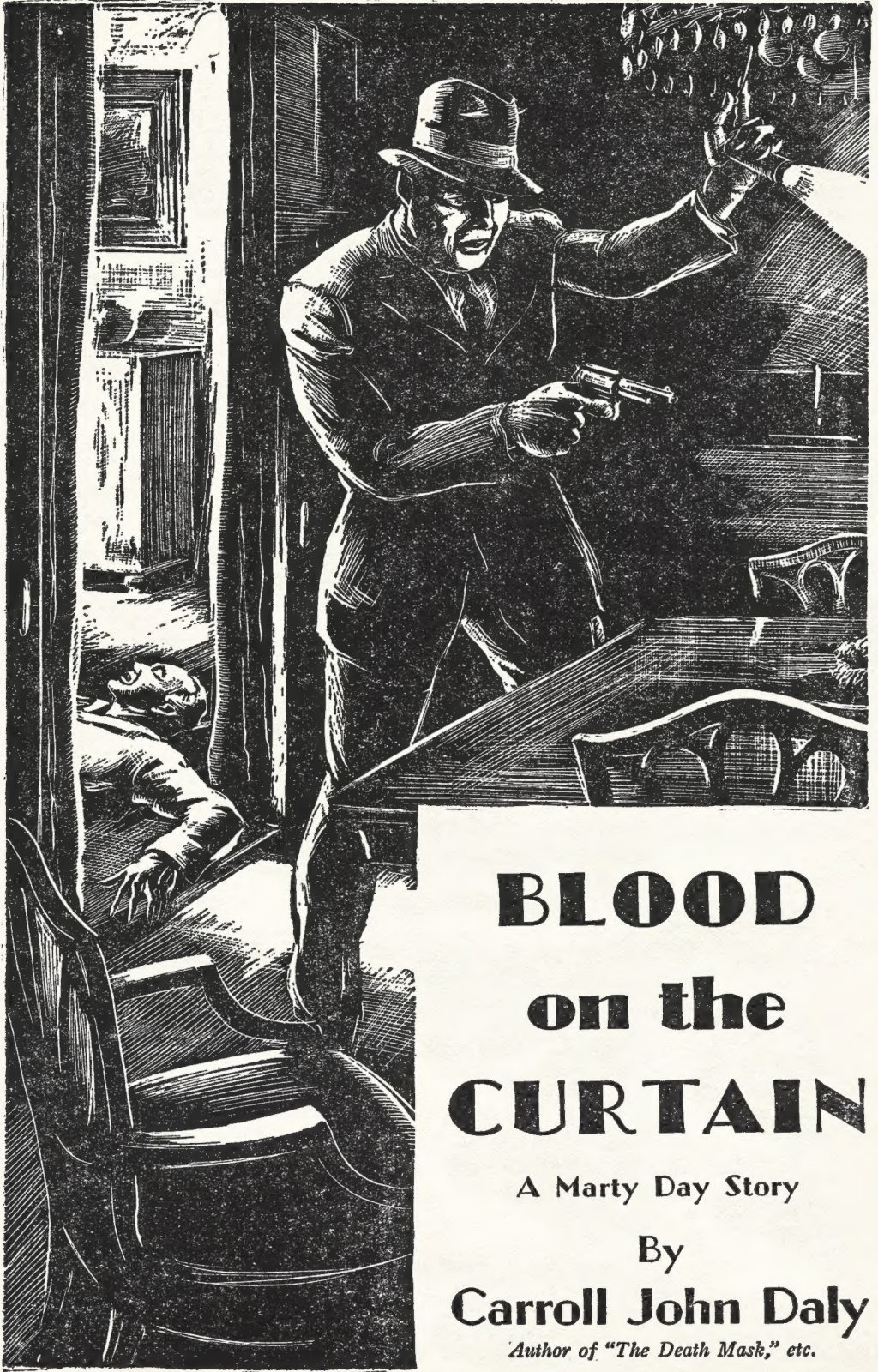
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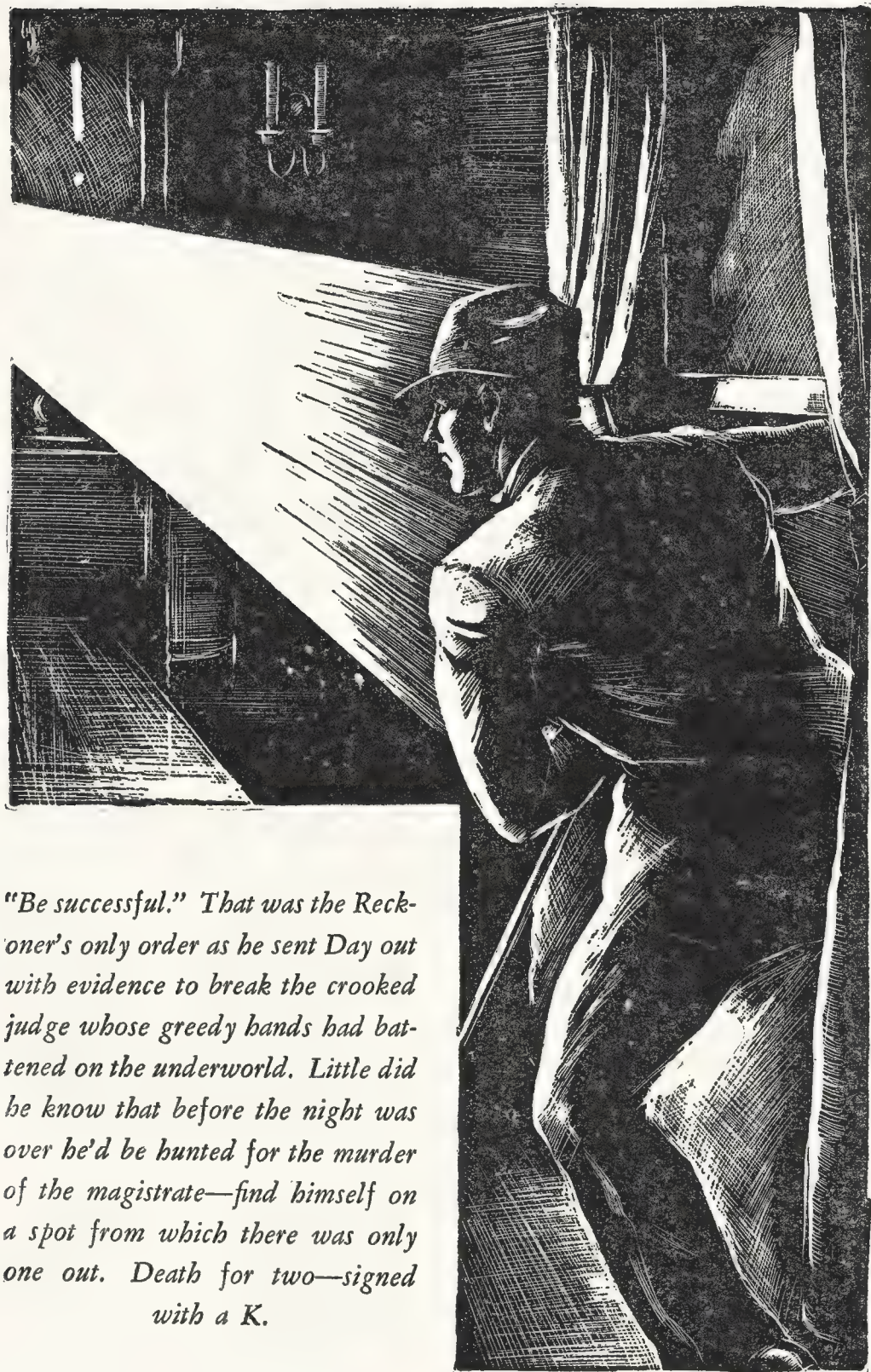
BLOOD
on the
CURTAIN

A Marty Day Story

By

Carroll John Daly

Author of "The Death Mask," etc.



"Be successful." That was the Reckoner's only order as he sent Day out with evidence to break the crooked judge whose greedy hands had battered on the underworld. Little did he know that before the night was over he'd be hunted for the murder of the magistrate—find himself on a spot from which there was only one out. Death for two—signed with a K.

"You'd better come in out of that window."

CHAPTER ONE

The Reckoner's Dude

MARTY DAY sat in the bright light and listened to the monotonous, metallic voice of the Reckoner. Finally the voice died away; the thin sheet of steel slid closed, and the bright glare of the light that always prevented Marty from seeing the face of the unknown man who gave him orders snapped out.

A moment of waiting, and the ceiling light showed dully and Marty faced, as he had so often faced, the curtain of steel. It shut off completely the front of that room from the back. A pawn shop by day; a place where the Reckoner met and talked to those who obeyed his orders, at night.

There would be three full minutes now, anyway, before the key would turn in the lock of the door behind him and Marty would be free to go—go on the errand that the Reckoner had commanded. Those three minutes Marty spent in thought.

He thought of the Reckoner, whom he had first met through the girl, Tania; whose orders he took because of the girl and the spirit of adventure, for the Reckoner's business was the righting of wrong—Marty smiled. There was money too; the Reckoner paid well for service and his resources seemed unlimited. Besides, once rich, Marty's funds, like the funds of countless others, had been swept away in the great depression.

There were times, of course, when Marty Day thought of quitting the Reckoner; when the good the Reckoner was doing was over-shadowed, far over-shadowed, by his method of accomplishing that good. There was that time for instance, when he had been willing to sacrifice Tania's life rather than meet the demands of the crooked politician, Joseph T. Rierson. There was that time when he

used Tania as bait, human bait, in his trap to snare "Razor" Burke, the murderer of Senator Hopewell. Marty had saved her then; Marty had thought then to throw up the whole business and leave the city; leave the Reckoner, taking Tania with him of course.

But Tania would not go, and now Marty too was more deeply enmeshed in the net of the Reckoner. Marty nodded. Yes, if facts were known; if the Reckoner wanted to, he could disclose to the police the dead man in Marty's apartment. Oh, Marty hadn't killed the man; and even if he had, the man deserved to die—had to die.

Zee Clarke, the mystery woman who feared nothing perhaps not even the Reckoner, had shot that man to death to save Marty; to save Tania. And Marty could do no less than take the blame; or rather the responsibility for that killing. Zee Clarke had asked him to do that; to admit the killing to the Reckoner; to Max Arnold, the criminal lawyer who had seen to the removing of the body. But it was too late to think of that now. The woman had saved his life. But who was this Zee Clarke? What—

And Marty was through thinking. He came to his feet. The lock had clicked in the door. From the little ledge below the thin curtain of steel he lifted the envelope the Reckoner had given him to deliver and walked toward the door. His steps were quick, even eager. Not because he had just been paid well for taking that envelope, but because his reward was—well, he was to see Tania again.

THE little pawnbroker, who must have tended the shop by day, though Marty didn't know, for he never visited it except at night, bowed ingratiatingly as he led Marty down the narrow hall, around the bend to the side entrance and onto the street.

Marty, whistling now as he turned across town, hesitated as he spotted a cruising taxi—and decided he had time to walk. He felt pretty good about the Reckoner this time. He felt pretty good about the message he was to deliver to Judge Ramdelfia. Indeed, it was he—Marty, who had been instrumental in that message to the judge. It was he who had raided Joseph T. Rierson's house; almost lost his life as well as his freedom, and taken from Rierson the written information that should—that would make Judge Ramdelfia an honest man; at least, on this occasion.

Marty tapped his pocket where the envelope was, thought of the money he had received, wondered where the Reckoner's unlimited resources came from. Was he just a wealthy man who abhorred crime? But that didn't seem possible. The Reckoner knew the under-world; knew its workings; knew almost to a certainty who committed crimes, who was behind them, where evidence could be obtained. But mostly Marty thought of Tania. The Reckoner's last words to Marty had been—"Tania will have a late supper with you at your apartment tonight. No—no, Mr. Day, there is no reason for you to telephone your servant, Knight. I have arranged that. Be successful!"

No wish that Marty would be successful; no hope, even, that he might succeed with his mission. Just the command, "Be successful!" Nothing more.

MARTY swung his cane easily over his arm, started around the corner—and threw himself flat on the sidewalk.

The car must have been waiting and jumped from the curb. Black curtains flashed open, white faces showed, and almost at the moment Marty crashed to the sidewalk orange-blue flame spat suddenly from that car. There was no doubting

the steady *rat-tat* of the machine gun; no doubting the whining death that sped over the spot where he had stood a few seconds before; leaden death that was flashing down toward the walk on which he lay; on which he lay for a stunned moment only. Then, twisting his body, he rolled quickly toward the areaway.

But he had little hope of saving his life. For the moment only would he dodge that spraying death. For a time only it had ceased. The men in the car had spotted the twisting body. What good would the sunken areaway do him? A minute or two, maybe, of protection; a few seconds even. Then men would jump from that car and a Tommy gun would play its tune of death into his body.

A moment of silence. At least, silence after the steady *rat-tat* of lead. Then the grinding of brakes, the screech of protesting tires, and Marty felt that the end had come. Funny that, as he waited for death. His past life didn't flash before him, his misdeeds, or even his childhood. Just one thing; one clear picture. He would not eat that supper with Tania! He would—

And the lead came; he heard the sharp report of it. One, two, three shots. Close together, those shots? Certainly. But not with the staccato notes of a machine gun.

Running feet now, a hoarse voice calling. More pounding feet, the shrill blast of a police whistle. Then again the steady, deadly notes of a machine gun; and far distant, the shrill cry of a siren.

The machine gun stopped, a car door slammed, a motor raced, and there was the grinding of badly meshed gears. More shots after that, the dying of a distant motor—and a light straight down on Marty's face.

A voice spoke. "Did you make it? If you can come up out of there and—" a whistle from the man above him! "God!

Marty Day—Mr. Day, eh? So you're the one they wanted."

Slowly Marty mounted the steps to the sidewalk. Mechanically he brushed at his clothes, draped his cane over his arm, straightened out his crushed hat. But the light words of banter that heroes are supposed to use did not come from his lips; indeed, his mouth just hung open.

"Detective Frank Bradley!" he gasped at last, then added in a low voice, "Lieutenant Bradley, of the police." Marty was looking into a hard, grim, unemotional and honest face.

"That's right." Bradley took his arm. "Didn't get you, eh? Damn it! I might have known who they were after when the stoolie told me he heard one of them say, 'That dude gets it tonight.'"

"Dude!" Marty adjusted the carnation in his lapel. "Then it can't be me they were after."

"Well now," Bradley rubbed his chin, "you don't look much like a dude at present. But you act like one of them lads in books that go around straightening out other peoples' affairs or become gentlemen crooks; Robin Hoods of crime. Personally—in twenty-two years I never came across one face to face." He nodded vigorously. "But I like them in books"—and pushing a finger into Marty's chest—"and only in books."

"I suppose I owe my life to you, Bradley," Marty said, "and I'm grateful indeed." And with a shake of his head, "But I don't understand your allusions to my—er—activities. I can assure you I never stepped out of a book and I don't know who—"

"Well, I suppose these men took me for someone else."

"Sure. Sure!" he said. "But they'd have buried you as Mr. Marty Day. As far as your record goes—and you know I've got a line on you since you first slipped the strap off your go-cart and

went places—it's honest enough. But now you're in dangerous company, and you're getting ready to go places that will surprise you."

"You're not threatening me, Bradley, with—with—"

"Threatening you!"

BRADLEY'S eyebrows went up. "Threatening you! I'd do you a favor if I locked you up. I'd do it too if you didn't have such a smart lawyer—Max Arnold. That's another thing, Mr. Day. Honest men, walking the streets with honest purposes, don't have lawyers like Max Arnold sitting around with *habeas corpus* writs in their hands." And suddenly, "Why don't you talk while you can talk? You're not a crook. You're just kidding yourself into the belief that you're having adventure; romance, when you're really just—just—"

"Just a fool, eh?" Marty finished the sentence. "So you still believe in this newspaper myth, the Reckoner!"

"Sure!" Bradley agreed. "That's my weakness. Your's is that Rierson, the big-shot politician, is for some reason after your hide." And with steady gray eyes on Marty's black ones, "I suppose you figure he had a hand in this one."

"If it wasn't a mistake in identity, that guess might be as good as another. I wish you wouldn't keep such an eye on me."

"There's a lot who wish that." Bradley shook his head, and as a police car turned the corner, "I'll explain to the boys how the intended victim got away."

"Thanks!" Marty started to move down the street, then turned back. "I suppose you're doing this because I gave you the name of the murderer in the Senator Hopewell case."

"Yeah—sure." Bradley smiled crookedly. "After you patted me on the chin with your fist and left me cold in a cab!

No! Mr. Day; it's because I think you'll lead me some place." And grabbing Marty's arm as he would have left, "Here's another tip. Go home and go to sleep. I sort of like you, Mr. Day; yet I'm a police officer and I'm letting you walk away tonight so I can arrest you later—on a real charge."

"Later—on a real charge!"

"That's it," nodded Bradley. "Remember that people are safest in bed. But move along! I'll talk to the boys." This last as the police car drew up down the block and two men, seeing the couple close to the areaway, stepped out with drawn guns.

Marty turned and walked back down the street. Things were happening now. Windows were up; voices were calling; half-dressed people were visible far back in doorways.

Marty knew that Frank Bradley was explaining to the men who arrived in that car. He knew too that other cars were arriving. But he turned the corner at the far end of the street, entered a hotel, went immediately to the wash room, where an eager attendant who could not reconcile the condition of Marty's clothes with the absence of alcoholic breath carefully cleaned and brushed him.

Time was passing now. The hour of his meeting was eleven o'clock. When Marty left the hotel he climbed into a taxi and drove directly to Judge Ramdelfia's house.

CHAPTER TWO

A Question of Bail

THE old brick house was still much the same as it had been many years before. Judge Ramdelfia had been raised in the lower city; he stuck to it. Not because he loved the old place or even liked it. He had always planned to move; always hoped to move. But when the time

came that he could afford an elegant apartment on Park Avenue the time also came when he had become "the man of the common people." Somehow, when he couldn't move he gave that as his reason; now that he could afford the most pretentious quarters, that "reason" had back-fired on him. Politics and politicians—one politician in particular—kept him there. Joseph T. Rierson thought that his "man of the common people" was a good line. And since Rierson's nostrils did not have to be assailed by the odor of peddlers' fish nor his eyes offended by the dirty children of the poor, who played in the street, he kept Judge Ramdelfia "the man of the common people."

Marty Day nodded his satisfaction as he climbed the steps and pushed the door bell. It was exactly eleven o'clock. He liked that. Psychology played an important part in the business of the Reckoner. A man inside expected that ring, yet in a way he hoped it would never come; believed, perhaps, that it would never come.

The door opened almost at once; Judge Ramdelfia stood in the doorway. He wore a long dressing gown that went well with the interior of the house; it being done in the Park Avenue fashion that the judge felt himself denied. He was a tall thin man with his hair cut far back, so as to make a small forehead appear a high and scholarly one. He carried a book in his hand and a black ribbon hung from his glasses.

Marty thought that he stared overly long at him through narrowed judicial eyes, making no attempt to close the door. Then he spoke as Marty stepped into the hall.

"You are," he said, removing his glasses, rubbing them on his robe and replacing them again, "Mr. Marty Day, the man who made an appointment with me for tonight, or at least had an appointment arranged."

"I am," said Marty very slowly and solemnly, "the messenger from the Reckoner." It was part of his stock in trade to put feeling into his voice. But if the intention was to awe, as it very often did awe those the Reckoner threatened, it failed miserably this time.

"Yes, yes; to be sure." The judge closed the door slowly and said: "Come this way."

He led Marty into a well equipped and comfortable library, indicated a chair and dropped into another behind a flat desk.

"So"—the judge held his glasses in his hand now and tapped them on the palm of his other hand—"there is such a person then; such a personality as the Reckoner. How quaint! That envelope you are holding in your hand I presume is for me."

"It is," said Marty. "Later."

"So you are to talk first, Mr. Day. Let me warn you that the papers and gossip have informed me somewhat of this strange character. I have been on the bench a good many years. Before that I worked my way up from the streets; the very street, indeed, that I now live on. Those that know me can tell you without fear of contradiction that I cannot be intimidated, coerced or threatened. As for bribery"—he spread his hands apart—"my tastes are simple ones."

Marty Day nodded. "We are quite alone?" he asked.

"Quite. My single servant sleeps out." And after a moment's pause, "I am willing to listen."

AND Marty talked. Some of it he knew; some of it was what the Reckoner had told him.

"Joseph T. Rierson," he said, "was a gangster, murderer and racketeer some years ago. Prohibition swelled his pocket book; political influence bought by that pocket book swelled his head. He is now

the big frog in the big puddle—a particularly dirty, filthy puddle. Big men take orders from him. Some simply for money and advancement; some through personal fear, which so often follows money and advancement." Marty slightly raised his hand but the judge was not going to talk; he had just leaned forward upon the desk. "There have been a number of times when, in your court, justice has miscarried, witnesses have disappeared. And on occasions murderers, without sufficient evidence against them at the moment, have been admitted to bail just before that promised evidence has been produced."

"You are," said Judge Ramdelfia very slowly, "accusing me of these things?"

"I am," said Marty Day just as slowly, "stating facts. Shall I go on?"

"Certainly. It is all quite interesting—and quite damaging." Judge Ramdelfia smiled.

Marty continued. "Rierson is in a fair way to control the entire city. That, at least, is his ambition, his hope. He wishes to be the secret power that guides a great government; he is laying the foundation for that control. Not so long ago Joseph Rierson gave a dinner. You were one of the many men in the city who attended it. That dinner was for the purpose of letting each of you understand just how large and how terrifying was the big stick that Rierson wields over your heads. Separately, each of you were taken privately aside and shown the evidence that Rierson had collected against you. He was ready to strike and strike hard, and he wanted each of you to know the danger to yourselves in disobeying his orders. And you, Judge Ramdelfia, were shown evidence against you; evidence that would, if made public, put you away in a place where you would never more dispense 'injustice' to the people."

"That is all?" Judge Ramdelfia's eyes

narrowed, his thin lips set tightly.

"No," said Marty, "that is not all." And though his voice was still confident, beneath he was worried. The judge did not seem alarmed; struck with panic—even fear. But Marty went on. "The envelope that contained each ones misdeeds was stolen." He threw that suddenly at Judge Ramdelfia and waited for the blow to take effect.

But there was no blow—no apparent blow. The judge said quietly: "Yes, I know. You, Mr. Day, are the man who stole that envelope."

MMARTY stared at the man. This was the point where terror was to strike the color from the judge's cheeks. This was the point—Could it be possible that the Reckoner was wrong for once, or was it simply that the judge had made up his mind to obey the Reckoner's orders even before Marty came? Marty went on, stumbling slightly now; not so sure of himself; uncertain in his speech. But he carried out the Reckoner's orders.

"Senator Hopewell," he said, "was shot to death by a man called Razor Burke. We believed that Razor Burke got his orders to kill straight from Joseph T. Rierson, but he didn't. He got his orders from someone else. He got them from Don Parks, Rierson's official killer. Lieutenant Bradley discovered this. He will have the evidence complete tomorrow noon. You are going to release this Parks tomorrow morning; that is, you were going to release him tomorrow morning—set free a man you have never even seen."

"And the point?" said the judge, rapping the desk with one hand and stifling a yawn with the other.

"The point is—that Parks is like most of his kind. He can give it but he can't take it. He has let Rierson know that if

he isn't set free by tomorrow he'll talk and talk plenty. He'll talk Rierson right out of the control of the city and into Sing Sing Prison. Big men, for personal reasons, do not wish this. You are one of those big men. You have your orders to release Parks on bail."

"But my dear man"—the judge seemed bored—"there is really no evidence against Parks. Promised evidence is not sufficient to warrant my holding him further. In most cases we have such promises. Parks has now been held"—he looked toward the ceiling—"two—no, three weeks. Your plea may be very honest, very unbiased and very sincere. But it comes in a strange—"

"It is not a plea." Marty leaned forward on his cane.

"A threat?" said the judge.

"An order," said Marty. "If Parks is released on bail tomorrow"—Marty tapped the envelope he held in his hand—"the original of this document goes to the district attorney; copies to the press."

"So—" The glasses went onto Judge Ramdelfia's nose, his hand stretched out for the envelope. And as he took it and tore it open he kept his eyes on Marty and talked.

"You are very naive, Mr. Day." His voice was still quiet, but an ominous note had crept in. "You threaten me with blackmail in an effort to corrupt justice." He had torn the envelope open now and was taking out the several sheets of paper; smaller legal papers clipped to the back of a single larger sheet. "If you took these papers from Mr. Rierson and examined them you would see that they are not proof of any wrong doing. They may have cited a few cases which, on the face of them, seemed peculiar. But—"

The judge was reading the long sheet now and Marty, watching his face, saw it drain to a dull white. Then there were quick flashes of red in his cheeks that

were gone almost at once as he turned the long sheet of paper over and with trembling fingers examined the oblong bits of legal forms. He spoke, and his voice was thick; his words hardly audible.

"But he couldn't know that. Only Rierson knew that. It was not on that stolen sheet." And dropping the papers upon the desk he looked straight up at Marty Day. Gray eyes were wide and frightened. He said, and licked at his lips between the words: "Well, what am I to do; what can I do? Either way—the Reckoner or Rierson, it means prison for me."

Marty said slowly: "Do your duty. If this man, Parks, is not released tomorrow he will talk about Rierson, and then Rierson will have other things to occupy his mind than you."

"But this Reckoner! How did he know; how could he find out?"

Marty shrugged his shoulders. "He has had that notation about you for several months. He knew what to look for; evidently found it. Those papers are but copies of the originals he can and will produce." And eagerly, for above all he wanted Rierson and wanted the crooked officials he controlled; wanted the murderers he directed, "Rierson won't turn you up; at least, yet. He'll need your influence; he'll need your friends. He won't go against you until he's certain all hope for him is gone. Like Parks, he'll hope and wait."

"And then," Judge Ramdelfia hardly breathed the words, "like Parks, he'll strike."

"Then," Marty said, "you will leave the city—the country. You will have time to collect your resources and escape."

"Yes, yes." The judge was nodding now, mentally picking up his house of cards that had so suddenly collapsed; like a child trying his best with pudgy

fingers to save the few bent wobbling cards that still remained. "But the fifty thousand dollars! Couldn't it be less? I'm not a rich man."

"What fifty thousand dollars?" Marty was surprised into the question.

The judge tapped the paper on the desk. "That the Reckoner demands." He jerked up, straight in his chair. His face went ashen; his hand fell upon the desk, crushing the papers beneath it as he came slowly to his feet. The door bell had rung—long, demanding. Then it was ringing again.

"Detective Frank Bradley," whispered the judge, and before Marty could voice the question, "I thought it would only be—be what was taken from Rierson. Nothing wrong on the face of it, and I sent for Bradley to—to—" He looked at Marty.

"To have me arrested for blackmail, eh? So that was it!"

"That," said Judge Ramdelfia as he moved toward the door, "was it. I'll tell him—to go away." And he started slowly toward the hall, suddenly an old man.

Marty looked at the documents upon the desk. Even his untrained legal mind could see at once the completeness of the case against the judge; the thoroughness with which the Reckoner had gathered his evidence, even to the affidavits clipped to the back of the main sheet. That was why the Reckoner was slow to strike with the evidence Marty had furnished him. He waited until he was sure.

Marty gasped as the papers fell back on the desk and the long single sheet, with its closely typewritten letters, stared up at him. It was a P. S. at the bottom that made Marty's mouth hang open. It explained the final words of the judge; also, perhaps, explained the source of the Reckoner's income. The last few lines read simply.

P.S. The expenses and fee for this service which I render the citizen is fifty thousand dollars. Arrange to have the money in cash, by twelve o'clock tomorrow morning. By this time you will have refused Parks' bail, and a telephone message to your chambers will inform you as to the method of IMMEDIATE payment.

The Reckoner.

CHAPTER THREE

The Cobra Cane

THE outside door slammed, feet were coming down the hall. Marty quickly gathered the envelope and its contents from the desk and shoved them into his jacket pocket. Then he looked for a place to hide. There was the door he had entered; another door, probably to a front room of the house; and behind him heavy tightly drawn curtains, which must lead to the dining room. But whether a door was behind those curtains or not Marty didn't know.

Marty started toward those curtains, and listened. Feet were crossing the hall without, coming to the library. Marty straightened. Just a single pair of feet; uncertain, tottering feet. Perhaps not as uncertain as the feet that had staggered from that room, yet the same feet. The door to the hall opened and Judge Ramdelfia came into the room. His face was still white; there were beads of perspiration upon his forehead.

"It was Bradley?" Marty whispered hoarsely.

"Yes, yes. I had told him you were coming tonight. I didn't know, didn't understand." The judge ran a hand across his forehead, his moist forehead. "I told him you hadn't come; that the attempted intimidation did not materialize; that I had been mistaken, and for him to go."

Marty looked at those filmy eyes; the pale, dry, quivering lips, and the little beads of perspiration which had formed

again on his forehead. He said: "Did Bradley believe you?"

"I don't know, I don't know." The judge crossed the room, stood between Marty and the curtained doorway.

"Did he go?" Marty took the judge by the shoulders, backed him across the room, almost to those curtains. "Come, man—pull yourself together. Did Bradley go?"

"He— I don't know. At least, he's outside. I closed the door, bolted it. He looked strangely at me—smiled."

"Did he say anything? Did he—" Marty half shook the dazed man.

"*Shh!*" Dim eyes grew bright with fear. "There's a man above; a man I had wait upstairs, if—if you— I don't know. I feared violence."

"So—" Marty half curled his lips—"you intended to double cross the Reckoner—me—Bradley, if possible. A man to kill me, perhaps. Just self-defense. That was it, wasn't it?"

"No, no!" the judge moaned. "Rier-son suggested that; the—the killing of you. But—no. I wouldn't have tolerated it." And gripping Marty suddenly by the shoulders, "Rier-son! If he were dead now, nothing could harm me. The Reckoner wants him dead. Then I might stay on the bench, serve justice, serve the Reckoner."

"Serve him—how? Do as he told you, justice or no justice?"

"Yes, yes. That's it." The judge's voice was ingratiating. "Only Rier-son knows the truth about me. People admire me, respect me. I might go far—far, if Rier-son were dead. The Reckoner could order. I could do things cleverly; I have done things cleverly. No one would suspect. I—Yes, I have even—Well, for him I could clear men even of murder."

"God!" Marty pushed the man from him. "What a filthy swine you are."

"Not so loud—so loud." The judge

looked toward the closed hall door. "Better go—go. The window there in the dining room, and into the alley. Why do you stay? Why don't you go?" And gripping Marty's arms tightly, "Tell the Reekoner what I offered for Rier-son's—" and perhaps seeing Marty's eyes, "If Rier-son shouldn't talk—couldn't talk. Go! Why don't you go?"

"Just one thing." Marty looked coldly down at the crouching, trembling little figure. "About tomorrow? You will deny the man bail?"

"Of course. Of course. I'll let Rier-son think differently, then I'll make a speech from the bench against freeing public enemies. I'll—I'll see that Parks is convicted too; that he talks about Rier-son, if Rier-son can't—can't talk back."

MARTY turned his eyes away. He couldn't look at the whining, cringing figure. The man of the people! The rottenness of politics and crime. Only a month before the judge had been given a dinner. Marty recalled reading about it in the papers. The judge's speech; his public hatred for all that was criminal! The big official who had said Judge Ramdelfia was doing more to wipe out crime than any other single man in the great city! The judge—

Marty jumped back. There was a single crack of a gun; a shot that seemed to be in that very room itself, yet slightly muffled. And Marty lowered his eyes and looked straight into the eyes of the judge. There was nothing bright in them now; nothing quivering about the lips.

Things happened quickly after that. Marty heard the glass of a window crash, yet couldn't locate the direction of the noise. But he was watching the man before him.

Judge Ramdelfia's eyes held a pained, hurt, childlike look. He seemed to shake his head—as he stared at Marty, half

questioning, half pleading with Marty to—well to help him, or was it to spare him? Spare him what?

Then Judge Ramdelfia's hands dropped to his sides; his eyes took on a glassy, uncertain look. Words that never came rattled far back in his throat. He bent slowly at the knees, half tried to raise his hands; then his chin dropped forward on his chest and he sank slowly to the floor.

"God!" Marty's breath whistled back in his throat. But he knew the truth even before the judge's body crumpled there upon the library rug. Someone had shot the judge; shot him directly through the back; shot him from behind those curtains. And that crash of glass? The man had escaped through the dining room window then.

Marty gripped his cane, tore through those curtains, found the old-fashioned folding doors partly open. He forced them wider, mostly with his body. He was in the dining room; across to the window. The window was open, curtains waved gently in the breeze. That was how the killer had escaped. One foot over the window sill, Marty paused. There was no glass on the floor. Still, it might have fallen outside in the alley. Might have, but it hadn't. Marty felt carefully of the window. No glass broken there; he had covered both the upper and lower sections.

Yet he had heard glass. The killer, then, had gone another way. Through the front hall, into the front room—

Should he follow him? It was almost certain he was out of the house; the breaking glass told him that. He had run in panic then. Panic? Strange, that, in a man who so calmly raised a gun and from between tightly drawn curtains had shot a man straight through the back. Who was he? The man who waited above, of course; the man whom Rier-son

had sent. He had sneaked below, heard the judge plan to hold Parks; to even betray Rierson; to work for the Reckoner. But the man was gone; and he was fool enough to sit there like that astride the window sill.

And then, abruptly, Marty's indecision was gone and his course of action was suddenly decided for him. For the second time that night, within the hour, a bright light flashed upon his face. And a familiar voice said: "Come in out of that window." Light showed in an old chandelier above a round table, the flash dropped from Marty's face and the voice went on. "Not so pleasant this time, Mr. Day. I told you to go to bed, but I didn't think it would be murder."

MMARTY climbed back into that room. The eyes of Lieutenant Bradley, still unemotional, were cold and hard. There was an unfriendliness in his voice that Marty had never noticed before. But Marty only said what was on his mind. He was still confused, puzzled.

"The man—the man who shot him got away. I thought—" He looked toward the window behind him, suddenly back to Bradley; and the jumbled, odd pieces in his mind snapped quickly into place. "It was you, Bradley, who crashed the front window. Then the murderer escaped by this one."

"Not yet he didn't." Bradley was very serious. He waved a gun toward the library. "Get in there, Day. Judge Ramdelfia wants to talk."

"My God!" The words just shot from Marty. "You don't think I did it?"

"No?" said Bradley as he prodded Marty through the curtains with the nose of his heavy police gun, with his other hand fanned him expertly for weapons. "If the judge doesn't talk and talk your way, they'll fry you sure. That sitting-on-the-window-sill act doesn't look so

good, nor does the judge's message he sent me that he expected a blackmailer tonight."

Bradley was right of course. Marty knew that. He saw himself now in court, facing a jury; telling of his meeting with Judge Ramdelfia; of the man the judge said lurked in the house; that Rierson had sent the man to—Rierson, one of the biggest political influences in the city, and to be still bigger unless—Marty looked down at the figure gasping for breath. Well, there was still that evidence in his pocket. When Bradley found that on Marty, would it help him or hurt him? He turned his head from the gasping, dying man and spoke to Bradley.

"He was a crook; not fit to live, and—"

Bradley, kneeling by the body, his gun directed toward Marty, said: "You can't go around killing all men not fit to live."

"But he isn't dead yet." Marty gripped his cane tightly in tense fingers. "He wants to talk. Look! Lift up his head. He— Let me go to the kitchen for water."

"No!" said Bradley. "I couldn't do that." He lifted the gasping man's head and let it rest on his left arm, but the gun he held in his right hand was still pointed straight at Marty.

"But my life may depend on it," Marty gasped. "You know me, Bradley. You don't think, can't believe that I'd shoot a man in the back."

"So that's how he got it." Bradley nodded. "People do strange things when they're pushed; swept into the stream of crime they thought they'd just drift along on the edge of." And with a shrug of his shoulders, "After all, it's what twelve men will think and believe that will count."

"But I couldn't do it." Marty was alarmed at the strange gurgling sound in the dying man's throat. "You felt me for weapons. I haven't got a gun."

"Just a quick frisk," explained Bradley. "You might have dropped it from the window. We'll find that out later. But since you remind me of it—keep both your hands in front of you, gripping either end of that stick like you are now."

"If I could get him water! If he'd talk, he'd tell the truth. The curtains just parted from behind and—"

"No!" snapped Bradley; and sharply, "Shut up. This lad's going to talk now—talk real words."

JUDGE Ramdelfia raised his head slightly; his glassy eyes turned brilliant—feverishly brilliant. Little bubbles of saliva formed on his lips. He looked long at Lieutenant Bradley, turned his eyes but not his head and stared at Marty Day. And Marty saw fear in his eyes; then hatred.

Twice Judge Ramdelfia opened his mouth to speak and twice closed it again. At least, tried to close it; for his lower lip hung down, preventing his mouth from closing tightly.

Then his right hand began to move. Very slowly it raised. There was agony in his face; he was forcing himself with his last ounce of strength to raise that arm.

Marty didn't speak, Bradley didn't speak. Both men knew that the moment was coming. The lump went out of Marty's throat. The judge would clear him! Might accuse him of something, or the Reckoner of something. But certainly free him of any charge of—of murder.

The arm ceased to rise, the fingers of the judge's hand closed one by one, until only the index finger remained extended. And this finger pointed directly at Marty Day.

The judge seemed to suck in a great breath. His chest expanded, his head came up, and his burning eyes followed

that finger—that accusing finger as he spoke very slowly and very, very clearly.

"That man is the one who shot me. His name is Day." Lips opened, snapped back; then again, just as clear, "He called me a filthy swine, then shot me."

Bradley laid the dying man's head down on the rug and looked up at Marty Day. "God!" he said, "I didn't believe it; couldn't make myself believe it until he spoke. But we live and learn."

For the moment Marty was stunned, stunned into silence. Then he fairly shouted the words as he moved forward. "It's a lie; a lie! Make him deny it. Make him—"

And Marty stopped. He didn't know what was on his mind; if he intended to shake the truth from the dying man—dying as he lied. But why did he lie?

Marty knew why he stopped if he didn't know why he had started forward. Bradley had come to his feet and stepped across the body. His right hand held the gun pointing almost directly at Marty's stomach, his left hand dug into a rear pocket. He said, and there was no friendliness in his voice: "Keep your hands just so, gripping that cane. No—no, Mr. Marty Day. Dying men don't lie like that, or if they do you'll have your day in court. There!"

Gun in his outstretched right hand, handcuffs dangling now in his left, Detective Bradley walked toward Marty Day. His eyes were riveted on Marty's eyes.

"What are you going to do?" The words were spoken before Marty knew that the voice that spoke them was his voice.

"Put the irons on you and call headquarters. Keep your hands on that cane a moment now." The gun was held close to his own body, covering Marty but still a good foot or more away. His mouth was tightly set, his chin thrust forward.

"Keep your hands on that cane!" The words echoed in Marty's ears. He didn't have to think now. The thing was a natural. Detective Bradley had made his own trap and then stepped into it. Marty's cane; his cobra cane! The heavy steel already arched in his hands for that swift, unseen attack. No, Marty didn't think then; he wished afterward that he had thought. Or if he did think, it was just one thought. It was the time to strike, the very second to strike. That gun coming an inch nearer, that forward chin straightening and—Marty knew.

There was no danger that he'd miss, not with that deadly weapon in the expert hands of Marty Day. It was all mechanical this time; no maneuvering for position. No—

Just for the flash of a single second the accusing voice of Judge Ramdelfia rang in his ears. "Day. He shot me." Then Marty did it. Mechanically certainly, if not actually unconsciously, Marty's right hand tightened close to the ferrule of that cane. His left hand pressed downward sharply, then released the curved head of the cane entirely. There was a sudden whining, almost inaudible sound as the hidden springs jumped into life. Bradley's eyes widened slightly. Then a dull thud as steel hit bone, and Marty Day was easing the unconscious body of the detective to the floor. No prize-fighter could have struck a cleaner blow nor put such power behind it. But the beauty of that cane to Marty Day was that, unlike a knife, a gun, a blackjack or even a human fist, the victim seldom if ever knew what had struck him. It could be used over and over and the trick was always a new one.

Yet, the satisfaction that Marty always felt at his deftness after years of practice with his strange weapon was absent this time. He had done it of course to—well, to save his life. But he hadn't

wanted to strike Bradley. He hadn't—

Marty whirled quickly and faced the curtains. A voice had spoken.

"Good work, Marty Day. In another moment I would have shot him to death through the curtains."

CHAPTER FOUR

Amber Eyes

THE tall, dark, willowy form of the mystery girl, Zee Clarke, stood between the curtains. In her hand she held a revolver. Those amber eyes, generally so cold and sinister, were now alive with admiration.

"I knew about that cane, but never— It was glorious." She jerked her head down toward the judge. "Has—" And listening to his gasping breath, "He won't last much longer. I'm glad you got Bradley yourself. I know men. Men like you would much rather do their own life-saving than have a woman do it."

"You know what—what happened?" Marty half stammered.

"Yes." She nodded. "I have a car around the corner. It was for you, if things went wrong. You were a long time, so I came to investigate, found the window open, heard the voices and climbed in. I listened to the accusation; the judge's dying statement, but I won't talk." She smiled—yes, smiled beautifully there in the presence of death. "I would have shot Bradley sooner, only you stood between the curtain and him."

"Then, by striking Bradley—" Marty looked down at the unconscious form of the detective—"I really saved his life."

"Saved his life?" The girl's eyebrows went up. Then, "Well, yes—for the moment. Let him have it now and we'll get going."

"Yes." Marty nodded. "Get going. But—'Let him have it.' What do you mean?"

"What do you think I mean?" she flashed suddenly at him. "Don't be a child, or worse—a fool. Oh, it's not a pleasant job. But he has to die. Bradley knows the truth. He heard the *ante mortem* statement, as Max Arnold would say. Bradley's got to die that you may live."

"And you—you expect me to kill him? Kill a defenseless man!"

"You killed the other, didn't you? Murder follows murder. Or death follows death, if you can't stomach it the other way."

"But I didn't kill the—the judge," Marty stammered.

"Stop the play-acting." The amber-eyed girl fairly snapped the words. "Of course you killed him. Do you think I'm a fool?"

"You—you believe that?"

She looked at Marty a long moment.

"Of course I won't believe it if you don't wish me to, Marty." And the smile broadening, "At any event, I'll go on the stand and swear you spent the evening with—with me. With me! I have never loved a man, Marty, but once. I find men hard to love." A long pause. "I would find it very easy to love you."

"Well—yeah. Thanks." Marty was thrown completely. "We'd better get going."

"You can't leave that man, Bradley, here." She stood by the curtains and blocked Marty's passage, and when he went to push her aside, "Why, it's suicide. You're well known; distinguished-looking. God in heaven! Would you spare a cop; a cop who will stand up in court and point you out?" She placed her hands upon his shoulders, hair brushing his cheeks, hard eyes were closely knit. "He didn't have time to use the phone. There's his gun. Just the nose to his head; the slightest pressure of a finger. No one will ever know about him; about the judge. At least—" she was very close

now—"I only know. Maybe I'll drive a bargain with you for my silence; a bargain you'll like."

MARTY pushed her from him. "No, no." She was mad, he thought or maybe he was. She— But she was talking.

"It's his life or yours. You'll be a hunted man; a man who can't avoid the law. The time to act is now, not regret it a few months from now when Bradley puts the finger on you; when the twelve men come back, and one—"

"But I didn't do it," Marty told her.

"Who'd believe that, even if it were true. Not the judge who sentences you to death. Not the man who switches on the juice—yes, the juice. Picture that now; not later, when it isn't a picture but a ghastly fact—a terrible dream of truth."

"Come!" Marty thrust her roughly between the curtains. "We're different people, Zee Clarke from different worlds. I can't understand you. You must be mad. A helpless man—a man who saved my life tonight!"

"Saved it to take it. That's the law. They hire skilled surgeons; the finest specialists, to drag some poor soul back to life so that the State may have the pleasure of frying him. Well—" She twisted suddenly, broke from Marty's grasp, crossed back into the room, knelt by the silent form of Lieutenant Bradley.

"All right." She spoke as she came to her feet and stood over the detective. "If you haven't got the stomach for it, I'll do it."

Marty turned; his eyes widened, his mouth hung open. Zee Clarke was standing above Bradley; Bradley's gun was in her hand. Her finger was on the trigger, the stub nose pointing down at the side of the man's head; pointing, and, yes—Paralyzed, Marty saw the knuckle of her

index finger whiten; whiten as the finger started to close upon that trigger.

Then he was paralyzed no longer. The girl was very close to him. He reached out, grasped her arm, swung her around so that she faced him, his hand slipping to her wrist—to the gun it held, twisting it from her grasp. The girl stared blankly at him.

"I might—might have shot you," she said as she watched Marty take his handkerchief, and after wiping the gun free of fingerprints toss it beside the unconscious detective. Confusion was gone now. Marty was the man of action again, whom the Reckoner found so useful; paid so well.

Marty, his cane hooked over his arm, grabbed the girl, almost rushing her off her feet as he half carried, half hurled her through those curtains and across the dining room to the open window. For a moment only she fought; then, as he lifted her to the sill and dropped her to the stone alley below and jumped down beside her she stopped her struggles; even laughed lightly.

"You can work fast when you want to, Mr. Day. You could go far with the Reckoner if—if you'd stop being the moving-picture hero. You're just too noble." Her shoulders shrugged and she took his hand and started leading him down the alley. "It's too late now. A murderer should never return to the scene of his crime. Have you still got the gun?"

"His gun—now?" And seeing her eyes, even in the darkness, "I didn't have any gun. I tell you—I didn't shoot the judge."

"All right." She sighed. "That's your story and you're going to stick to it." She stuck her head out of the alley and looked up and down the street. "Not a soul in sight. The car is around the corner, but there's still time; still time to go

back and finish the job. God, Marty—" she clutched at the lapels of his coat—"I'm superstitious as hell about returning, but I'll do it for you. Let's—"

Marty tried to smile down at her; tried to speak, but didn't. Amber eyes, soft and shining in the darkness, became hard and narrow; thin slits of animal-like brightness.

And the shots came!

MARTY never knew if they were out of that alley and speeding up the street when the first shot came, or even the second for that matter. But, anyway, they did reach the street, did run up it, did turn the corner and climb into the long low roadster. And they were away, jumping from the curb, as the car picked up speed under skilful driving. They were around the corner, dashing uptown—ducking down one side street, to turn up another before he spoke.

"Someone else was in the house then, or came through the alley in back," he said to the girl. "A cop, who—"

"No one else was in the house, no one came through the back." She was very emphatic. "I looked directly past you. Remember, in your hurry to throw me out that window you left the dining-room lights burning. I was looking directly from the darkness into light. I saw the white face plainly at the window, recognized it before he even raised the gun and fired. It was Lieutenant Bradley. The hunt has started." Marty gasped. "He saw us, recognized us! He came around quickly."

"He might have seen us—just shadows in the darkness. But he could not have recognized us." She swung another corner, straightened and sped uptown again.

"Where are we going?" Marty clutched her arm. "My apartment is—"

"Good God!" Zee Clarke said. "You wouldn't be fool enough to go there."

"But—" Marty stopped, with the name of Tania on his lips. "I guess I'll have to hide out for a while. But I can go there a minute, before—"

"I know. I know," she cut in before he could interrupt again. "It's Tania Cor-det. You were to have had supper with her. I'll bring her to you."

Marty looked at her as they turned up the pretentious street and swung suddenly into the driveway of one of New York's famous old mansions.

"You—you live here?" Marty could not keep the surprise out of his voice as the car jerked to a stop beside wide stone steps. "This place belonged to the—" He mentioned one of New York's best known social and former financial names; and suddenly as he followed her from the car, "Why, this place was bought by Colonel Jacob Clarke, the eccentric millionaire. You're not his widow?"

The woman laughed. "I am, perhaps, the most noted of his eccentricities."

"And the Reckoner forced you into this—this fight on crime?"

"No one forced me into anything. I like it. I like the excitement and danger of it. You all fear and tremble before the words of the Reckoner, but not I." She opened the outer door, ignored the great double entrance doors before her, turned to the left and opened another door; one which Marty had not seen, could not see. They entered a small room.

"You—you must have many servants," Marty warned. "Some of them will see me and talk, and—"

"They will not see you and they would not talk if they did. When I enter by that side door it is indicated by a light in each servant's room. They all know that I have returned and do not wish their services. This is not a secret room; only the entrance to it by the vestibule is hidden. The door there gives off on a small hall which leads to the entrance

hall as well as to my rooms above." She walked across the room, pressed against a large picture which swung back at once. There was a small wall safe behind it.

Her fingers were on the dial when Marty asked: "Why that? I don't need money." He felt in his pocket. "At least, not yet. But, Tania. She—"

"Right!" The woman turned from the safe, sought a small telephone on the low table and quickly dialed a number—Marty's number. She said, over her shoulder to Marty: "Tania had better be informed at once, before the police get there. If she is followed and— Hello, Knight, Mrs. Clarke speaking. Have Tania come and see me at once. Yes, I know that she is waiting for Mr. Day, but tell her to come to me at my home. Now Mr. Day will speak to you."

MMARTY lifted the phone, spoke quickly. "Trouble, Knight. Have the police been . . . They haven't! Very well. Have Miss Tania leave at once. Then leave yourself. Explain downstairs that I have gone on a hunting trip and you are joining me. Leave no address. Then register at a quiet hotel; say, the Dolphin, on Fifty-fourth Street. Use the name—" and without any reason for it but seeing that Zee Clarke was quite interested— "the same name as last time. I'll get in touch with you when I need you." The phone snapped back in the cradle.

Zee Clarke spoke. "You are to stay here. I have rooms; rooms that have waited for you."

She went back to the wall safe again, manipulated the dial, then stood back. A large section of the paneled wall swung open, the small safe almost in the center of it, the steel back sticking out behind. Marty saw a flight of narrow stairs, leading above.

"It's very sensible." Zee Clarke

nodded. "A careful search by a clever man or even by one educated in such devices would locate the spring which releases the picture. Once the safe came into view the picture is satisfactorily explained. One would not look further. Come!"

She led Marty onto the small flight of stairs, left him there a moment in the sudden darkness as she manipulated the mechanism that returned the door and picture to their former position; then she snapped on a light.

At the top of those stairs was a small door and beyond that door a room of almost Oriental grandeur; luxurious ease amidst that grandeur.

"My weakness." She tapped a bear skin with her foot. "Beyond, through the bath, is a bedroom; modern, serviceable—comfortable even for a man." Soft lights shone from many lamps as she looked at Marty, held him with those amber eyes; very soft now, even moist.

She came close and looked up at him. "I want you to like this room, Marty."

"I do like it." Marty saw for the first time how deep the amber eyes were; almost a bronze, far back in those hidden—well, perhaps not entirely hidden depths. He was startled, partly worried.

Then with a swiftness—somewhat like his cane, Marty thought—her arms were about his neck. Her face below his, eyes alive, staring up; searching, wondering eyes, a new light in them, a brightness that meant—well, Marty was not a conceited man but he knew what they meant; what those lips meant. And he knew something else. Certainly here was a woman of great passion. Not simply a great love, but capable of a great hate—that might be visited on him, but mostly might be visited on Tania.

MARTY was human too. That body so close to his was—He lifted his eyes from those burning bronze balls. Her

chin was raised, her lips were very close; warm breath swept his face. There was a second of indecision—and Marty raised his hands, took her wrists, lifted her arms gently from his shoulders, forcing the hands from the back of his head; hands that had begun to draw his head forward—downward. Then, holding those wrists, he spoke.

"You have done a lot for me, Zee," he said, and his voice was husky. "I can't understand you but you've been a friend. You saved Tania's life and mine; you would have saved it again tonight. Would have—" His breath caught far back in his throat as he thought of the unconscious Bradley. His hands went to her shoulders. "I love Tania," he said simply, thrust her roughly from him and turned and crossed the room.

He had done it. Given her the truth. Now what? Had he unleashed a fury; a hatred toward him and Tania? And he waited for the tirade of words; the abuse that she would hurl at him.

But no angry, threatening words came. No abuse. Just a moment of silence. Then a laugh; a low, musical laugh.

"You're afraid of me, Marty," she said. "But mostly you're afraid of what I may do; how I may strike Tania; the influence I may have with the Reckoner; the truths that I might tell the law; the trap that I might lay for Tania, whom Rierson would so willingly destroy. But all that is for a woman of weakness, who lets hate take the place of love. No, what I want, I get." She was across the room now, had gripped him by the shoulders and swung him around. "Look at me, Marty. I fear no woman; recognize danger in no woman. Tania, who works for the Reckoner through fear of a past wrong being exposed! Were I in her position I would have killed him long ago. A woman whose blood is water, whose stomach is a lump of fear in her

throat. And I—” Her arms were about his neck again, her chin was on his chest, her bronze eyes searching, calling—demanding. And—

A buzzer, low and soft; yet, like the screech of a great siren to Marty, sent him staggering back.

Zee Clarke looked at him a long moment. Then her eyes turned from Marty to the tiny red light on the wall above the bathroom door.

“Tania,” Zee Clarke said, but there was no malice in her voice. “It’s a break for her, eh, Marty? But we won’t begrudge her that. She’ll need all the breaks she can get.” She turned suddenly and walked toward the door. “Wait here.”

CHAPTER FIVE

Tania

ZEE CLARKE passed out onto the stairs. The door closed; there was the decided click of a key. Marty grinned. He was a prisoner in that room. And the grin turned to a perplexed expression, more than an actual scowl. He was a prisoner to Zee Clarke. He thought that over a moment. Was he a prisoner in more ways than one? He shook his head and looked the room over.

The air was clear and fresh but there were no windows. While he wasn’t looking for or especially interested in the ventilating system, he was interested in windows. And Marty suddenly realized he hadn’t seen the other rooms.

He walked through the bathroom. No windows here either. Then a bedroom beyond. Surely there must be another method of entrance; or rather, exit! It wouldn’t do to be hemmed up here with escape only by those stairs. Surely—And he was in the bedroom. The same method of ventilation existed in both the bath and bedroom, and there were no windows.

Then Marty saw it. The door close to

the bed. No secrecy about that. Nicely paneled, hinges exposed top and bottom, and a knob to grip. Also a key in the lock. Quickly Marty crossed the room, placed a hand on the knob and found the door locked. With a little grimace he tried the key, turned it and pulled the door toward him. It came slowly. But as he pulled the harder the door swung fully open. It was heavily weighted down. From the top to the very bottom of the other side of that door were shelves, and those shelves were neatly packed with freshly ironed linen.

Marty nodded his understanding as he stepped into that closet and pulled the door partly closed behind him. By the light of the bedroom he saw that the closing door fitted in with other shelves above it, making the whole appear the back of a linen closet. There was another door that almost met the shelves. It yielded beneath his grip. Marty turned and went quickly back into the bedroom.

When a few seconds later he again entered that closet the light in the bedroom was out and there was a small pocket flash in his hand. He tried that outer door now and found that it gave on darkness; darkness that, after a moment’s listening, he pierced with his flash.

There was a long narrow hall, a door at the end to the right, a window to the left. Marty moved rapidly to this window, looked out into the rear of the grounds and was surprised at the garden in that spacious yard. Surprised too, to find a grassy terrace almost directly beneath the window, a luxury seldom found in that section of the great city. But what Marty looked at mostly was the distance to the ground, and what gave him considerable satisfaction was the fact that the window was not barred.

All his movements were quick and alert. It was a matter of seconds rather than minutes, and Marty was back in that

bedroom, the closet door that led to the hall closed tightly; the other door, with its shelves of linen, swung back and locked. Just one thing missing; just one difference. The key was missing from that closet door. The key was safely in Marty's pocket.

So, with a cigarette aglow, Marty was examining the shelves of books along the wall of the living room when the door from the stairs opened and Zee Clarke stepped back into the room.

HE swung quickly, his eyes eager, his face boyish; but that was gone in an instant. Tania was not with her.

"Tania!" he said. "It wasn't she, then?"

"But it was, Marty." Zee Clarke nodded. "You'll see her in a few moments." And reading the question in his eyes, "No, I won't bring her here. That's one thing I can't do for you. I'll take you to her but first I must make you familiar with these quarters."

"But I've seen them. I've been through them while you were downstairs."

"Nevertheless—" amber eyes never left his dark ones—"you will not deny me the simple pleasure of showing you this retreat, while Tania waits."

Marty followed her through the bathroom and into the bedroom, half listened as she explained the system of ventilation. But he nodded as he heard her say: "So, because of lack of windows and the air conditioning, these rooms are pleasantly cool even on the hottest summer days."

She was standing looking at the door to the linen closet while she talked. Then, pausing in the middle of a sentence, she turned and stretched out her hand to Marty.

"The key to that door please." And when he tried to look at her blankly, "I'm not going to speak of the possibility of the outer door being locked. The key!"

Marty dug into his pocket and handed it to her without a word.

She stood looking at him. "Trapped." Her voice was melodramatic but her eyes and lips smiled. "A man trap." And in a soft, low voice, "I hope you like it."

She dug the key suddenly into the palm of his hand and folded his fingers tightly over it. "You're wanted for murder, Marty Day," she said very seriously. "I wouldn't trap you here like that, and I don't think you'd be a coward enough or fool enough to run out on me. There's a linen closet beyond the door, a hall, and— Come, I'd better show you, in the event that the police should come."

Marty grinned. "And a window," he said. "I've been over the ground. Seems rather discourteous, after what you— You don't mind?"

"Mind!" she said. "Why, it's nice to feel that you're not altogether dumb, seeing that I'm going to marry you."

"Zee," Marty grasped her by the arm as they passed into the living room and reached the door to the stairs, "I'm very grateful and—Tania is grateful, but you must understand that I—we—"

She swung and faced him. Her eyes were brilliant bronze. They burnt into his. Mechanically, perhaps unconsciously, he raised his hand and brushed it across his eyes. She said: "Don't be a fool, Marty; and don't talk like a book. When I saved Tania's life I did that for you, and for myself. I told you that I did not want the dead between us. The moment I want you I'll take you."

And when he just stared at her, "Conceit? Perhaps. But truth just the same. I know!" Her head came up. "The moment I fear Tania you will know it, but she will not. For a few minutes, perhaps, tonight you will hold her in your arms; for the last time. I will not deny her that. Come!"

THE conceit of the woman. The assurance, the confidence in her personal powers. Marty could have laughed; except, perhaps, that it was so tragic. He could have laughed; except, perhaps, that for the first time in his life he experienced a new sensation. A sinking feeling, that he tried not to recognize as fear; a new and terrible kind of fear. For a moment and a moment only he held a mental picture of this same woman standing over Lieutenant Bradley with a gun in her hand and—murder in her heart. And in this mental picture the face of Bradley seemed to change and become the face of Tania.

Then the picture was gone. Dazed and with uneven steps Marty followed Zee Clarke down those narrow stairs. When he reached the bottom, the fear was gone. His head was clear, his eyes were bright. After all, he was young, and he was going to see Tania.

Tania came! But she was not there in the living room below waiting for him. Zee Clarke had carefully closed the panel in the wall and pushed back the picture. She didn't insist that Marty bind himself to silence about those hidden quarters. She simply said: "I'll trust you, Marty, not to divulge to anyone my hideout; your hideout." Then she was gone.

Tania had come through that open doorway. She stood there a moment, frightened eyes searching that room. Then her firm mouth curved suddenly at the edges and she was across the room to him.

"What has happened?" Her breath came in quick sharp jerks, as if she had run a great distance. "I was sure there were two detectives outside the apartment. They saw me, of course, but they didn't know me. At least, I wasn't followed. Oh, Marty, something terrible has happened." And then, "Why are you here at Zee Clarke's; in this— this woman's home?"

"Shs—" Marty whispered, for Zee Clarke stood in the doorway.

"I'll leave you two alone for a bit," Zee Clarke said. "You will want to talk." And with a touch of sarcasm in her voice, "Tania, in her vast experience, will give you advice. But—" she turned in the doorway and flung the final words over her shoulder—"the man to advise you will be here in five or ten minutes. You see, Marty, I am practical as well as romantic." And she was gone, closing the door behind her.

"Who has she sent for—the Reckoner?" Marty placed his voice somewhere between Tania and the closed door.

Tania wasn't interested in who was coming but in what had happened. Not instinct alone told her something terrible was wrong. Marty here at Zee Clarke's was enough. But he told her all that had happened that night.

He felt better, too, as he talked. There was no doubt in Tania's eyes; not even when he reached the part of the judge accusing him and Bradley believing it. But he didn't tell her about Zee Clarke and her threat to kill; just said that she had been waiting for him and had brought him here.

"How terrible. How terrible. To know that he was dying and to lie like that."

"I'll have to find the man." Marty clenched his hands tightly. "I know Rier-son sent him. He will return to Rier-son. If—"

"But you can't—you can't. The police will be looking for you, Marty. You must hide. You must stay—" She paused, looked toward the door. "I'm jealous, of course, Marty; but it isn't that. I know Zee Clarke better than you do. She's hateful and vicious and—Don't you see, Marty; don't you understand? The woman loves you. I'm afraid."

Marty held her tightly then. "You needn't be afraid, Tania. I—"

"It isn't that." She read quickly what

was in his eyes. "At least, not only that, for she's a beautiful and charming woman. But she's also a dangerous one. She might— Marty, if she thought that you—we—she might—"

They both turned. Zee Clarke had opened the door and was holding it so, pressing her tall, slender body against it to let a man pass; a man who was taller than she was; as tall as Marty but who gave the appearance of still greater height because of the looseness and slimmness of his body. His steps were quick and jerky, his shoulders slightly bent as he crossed the room. It was Max Arnold, the famous—or perhaps better described as the most notorious criminal lawyer in the city.

He bowed deeply to Tania and seemed to keep those eyes that were rather too closely set together on her for a long time. Then he crossed to Marty, put a corrugated damp hand into his, snapped his thin lips and said: "You seem to have gotten into a mess." He jerked a thumb toward Zee Clarke. "She told me, but I want to hear it all from you."

CHAPTER SIX

Wanted For Murder

MARTY told the story again. Everything that had happened, straight up to the time he struck Bradley. But he made it his fist then, not his cane. He stopped there and looked at Zee Clarke. She smiled behind the lawyer's back, nodded and spoke.

"It's all right, Marty. I told him I was there. Max has to know everything."

"Everything!" Marty's eyes went wide.

"That's right," said Max. "She told me of her suggestion to you. It is not for me to discuss the ethics of such an act, but her legal reasoning was perfect."

"And with Bradley dead, you— After that, you would have defended me?"

"My dear man—" Max Arnold coughed behind his hand— "I am not saying you

should have acted on the young lady's advice. In fact, I deplore such a suggestion. As for my defending you then!" Narrow shoulders moved. "If you had taken her advice you would have no need of my defending you. There would have been no witness, hence no accusation and no necessity of a lawyer."

"I did the best I could," Marty told him. "I knocked out Bradley and made my escape."

"The act of a guilty man. I understand you wish to deny the killing."

"Certainly. You, too, believe that I —"

"I'm your legal adviser and not your religious one. It is not what I believe that matters. It is my duty to make twelve men believe you are not guilty. If you had stayed on the ground and faced the music, could they have found the weapon on you or in the alley?"

"I had no weapon; no gun," Marty said sullenly.

"I take that as an answer to my question—that they would not have found any. That would have been a point in your favor."

"But the judge accused me of—"

"I know, I know. You were carrying papers that would have shown any jury that the judge was hand in glove with crooked politics. We would have produced those at the trial; will yet, of course — if we deem it advisable for you to stand trial. The judge's action might have been one of simple hatred; vengeance, in accusing you of his death. We would have claimed that, of course."

"And Parks— Don Parks?" asked Marty. "Wasn't he to turn on Rierson if he wasn't released by morning? He'll be a double menace to Rierson now, and—"

Max Arnold smiled, but it was not a pleasant smile. "Rierson put over what is known as a fast one on us; yes, on the Reckoner." He set thin lips grimly. "Ri-

erson was afraid Judge Ramdelfia would weaken and hold Parks. Parks was simply being detained at present as a material witness. By tomorrow—or rather, this afternoon—Lieutenant Bradley would have had the proof that Parks was actually guilty of murder, and he would have found no difficulty in taking him before a grand jury and obtaining an indictment. That's not guess work; that's knowledge. For the Reckoner would have furnished that proof through me.

"Somehow Rierson knew that our pressure on Judge Ramdelfia would be severe. He could not be sure the judge would break it, but Rierson has friends, has influence, has power. While we thought that by waiting until the last moment we'd catch Rierson sleeping, he caught us sleeping; caught the Reckoner sleeping. Yes, he went before another judge with a writ of *habeas corpus*. A few hours before you went to Judge Ramdelfia, Don Parks was released on bail. I have just discovered that."

"Then it was he—Don Parks—who went to Judge Ramdelfia's house and killed him."

"Why?" demanded Arnold.

"Someone shot the judge from behind that curtain," said Marty. "If it wasn't Parks it was another. But whoever it was, was greatly interested and very close to Rierson. So much so that he realized that if the judge betrayed Rierson he betrayed him also, or—" and Marty paused. "Parks was behind that curtain and realized that the judge was—was—" He looked suddenly up at Max Arnold.

"Why do you look at me like that? I know! You don't believe the judge told me there was someone upstairs. You don't believe my story that a man hid behind that curtain."

MAX ARNOLD did not speak. He looked straight at Marty.

"Well—" Marty demanded. "You don't

believe Parks shot him? You don't believe that that was the price of Parks' freedom; something else for Rierson to hang over his head? You don't believe that?"

"No," said Max Arnold, "I don't believe that."

"You don't," Marty talked rapidly, "because you believe I shot him. You think me guilty. Can you name a reason for my killing the judge?"

"He might have threatened you; secured a gun. You took it from him, and in the struggle shot him."

"My God!" said Marty. "Why, when I carried disgrace; a prison term for him in my hand? The Reckoner knows that; you know that. Does that make sense?"

"No, it doesn't," Max Arnold said grimly. "I'm trying to be easy on you, boy; I'm going to do everything to free you, or keep you free."

"Easy on me! You believe me guilty You—" Marty stretched out both his hands, grasped the hawked-faced lawyer by the lapels of his coat. "Well—tell me, then. What makes me guilty, to you? Can you name one sensible, or half-sensible reason for my killing the judge?"

Max Arnold pulled the hands from his coat with a strength that would have surprised Marty had he been aware of it at the time. Then he looked over at Zee Clarke. She turned her head from his steady eyes. After a bit she said: "It's up to you, Max. Tell him if you want to; you've got to save him."

"It's my duty then," Max Arnold said very slowly. "So here it is. Judge Ramdelfia told you that he had evidence which would send a certain party to jail; maybe burn that party." And when Marty would have cut in, he raised his hand. "You asked him for the evidence and he said it was personal; only in his head. Maybe he explained it. Maybe you lost your head. Oh, I dare say you have a hun-

dred excuses, but not one legal one. Then he turned, and you shot him."

"And who," said Marty very stiffly, his lips curling as he looked at Zee Clarke, "could so influence me, when I refused to kill a man to save my own life? Who—?"

"Tania Cordet," said Max Arnold simply. And certainly, with his shrewd brain, his long experience with crime and criminals, he would have seen the stunned innocence in Marty's face if the telephone had not rung just at that moment.

Max Arnold turned and lifted the phone, muttering something to Zee Clarke about expecting the call, as she crossed the room toward Marty.

"Cheer up, Marty," Zee Clarke said. "I suspected something like that all along. Half a man would have done the same thing. Max doesn't understand that. You thought you were in love with the girl, anyway, and—"

But Tania was between them, sobbing bitterly. Marty looked into her eyes. Did she believe it, too? Did she—?

MAX ARNOLD turned away from the telephone, and said: "Judge Ramdelfia died five minutes ago, at the hospital."

"Did—did he talk again?" said Marty.

"He never regained consciousness after being taken from the house." And as Zee Clarke asked if there was more news, "They are evidently keeping things quiet down at headquarters. The late morning editions will carry the story."

"And Marty's name in the headlines! The man-hunt has begun?"

"The man-hunt, maybe." Max Arnold stroked his chin. "But Mr. Day's name will not be mentioned. The police say they have learned the identity of the murderer but they are not divulging it. Of course there are always police leaks—" he smiled knowingly—"and I get them quickly. My agent at headquarters informs me that several of the shrewdest and most capable

men have been told to bring in Mr. Marty Day and to do it quietly. That's Lieutenant Bradley's work, of course."

"Why the silence?" Marty demanded. "Well, Lieutenant Bradley is a clever man, a shrewd man. It is quite possible, Mr. Day, that he wants you alone; wants to offer you a proposition. He wants to know who the Reckoner is."

"Hell!" said Marty, "I couldn't help him much on that."

"But you could help him on the names of the Reckoner's friends."

"He'd be wasting his time on that."

Marty jerked his shoulders. "The last thing I'll do is talk."

Max Arnold looked at him a long moment before he said: "Many men have thought that, until the constant reminder of burning flesh in the warm chair up the river makes them change their minds."

"But they haven't got me yet. Not by a long shot they haven't!"

"No, not yet. And that's what I want to talk to you about. Hiding you away some place. If you stay here you would involve Mrs. Clarke; make her an accessory after the fact. It's very serious, and —"

Zee Clarke cut in. "Marty won't talk, if that's what you're figuring." Her amber eyes blazed now as she swung on Max Arnold. "And don't hand him that high-minded act. He puts on enough of his own. He'll be safe here, and I couldn't be involved if I don't know; if the papers don't tell me that —"

Max Arnold's eyes were very narrow; seemed very close together now.

Tania spoke. "Mr. Arnold,"—she tried to make her voice calm, but it was high-pitched, somewhat like Max Arnold's—"You're not—not afraid that Marty may—that he—that there is danger; a personal danger to you or the Reckoner—that he might talk?"

"No, no. Of course not, my dear." And

again Max put his eyes long and steadily on the girl. "I am thinking of his safety. That's why I am taking him along with me. That's what the Reckoner will want."

TANIA looked at those narrow eyes, and mechanically her left arm came up and crooked through Marty's right. For a moment there was fear in her eyes. Fear for Marty or herself? She hadn't liked the way Max Arnold looked at her.

It was Zee Clarke who spoke. "Marty Day is staying here," she said coldly. "We haven't been followed or we'd know it now. You weren't followed, for they didn't have the time even if the police did check you up as Marty's lawyer. Later—Well you're my lawyer and come here often, day or night. You can visit Marty when necessary." And somewhat softening, "Besides, there has been no such order from the Reckoner." And with a smile, "If there should be I'll be needing another lawyer."

Max Arnold smiled; at least, his lips parted. "It was simply a suggestion, my dear," he said. And then abruptly, "I'll want Mr. Day's telephone number—a private phone he can answer. You have many here, I know." And when Zee Clarke gave it to him, "And you, Tania, I'll drive you home."

"But—" Marty stopped.

"I'm afraid," said Max Arnold very seriously, "that this time I must insist." He held open the door from the living room. Tania looked once at Marty, hesitated, then moving quickly across the room passed out the door. It wasn't exactly that she feared Max Arnold then, but she didn't wish to further—yes "further" she thought was the word—antagonize him against Marty.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Criminals All

FOR some time Marty stood there, stunned. Tania! Judge Ramdelfia

knew something about Tania? But he hadn't told him. The girl's name had not been mentioned; had not—And he thought of the words of Max Arnold; the chair at Sing Sing. Was there suspicion in Max Arnold's voice? Did he, like Rirerson, fear a man who, to protect himself, might talk? Was Arnold classing him with Parks; Don Parks, thief, murderer? Would the Reckoner want him out of the way? Would—Marty shuddered. He had gone into this thing for adventure; then stayed in it for romance—for Tania.

And then Zee Clarke was in the room, facing him. Marty spoke quickly; exactly what was on his mind. "Max Arnold, Zee. He suspected me, feared me maybe; feared that I might divulge his connections with the Reckoner. Are we then; am I then to be classed as a common thug, like Don Parks; like—?"

Zee Clarke smiled at him. "You can't just look at it through your own eyes, Marty. You've got to look at it through the eyes of others. To the law we're all criminals—common criminals. The law can't see the good behind robbing a man's house; the law can't see the glorious adventure in shooting a man to death. Yes, I think Max feared you tonight—or—" She shrugged her shoulders. "Men are queer. It is possible that you both love the same woman."

"You,"—and Marty's eyes widened—"Mean—mean Tania?"

"Yes—" she nodded. "I mean Tania. But don't worry. Nothing can happen to you here, through Max Arnold or anyone else. Not while I protect you." Was there a special emphasis on those words; a significance in their meaning?

"Zee,"—he went closer to the woman and looked down at her—"this reason for my shooting the judge. You believe that?" And when she didn't answer, because Marty didn't need an answer, "What could the judge know of Tania?"

"He could know what the Reckoner knows, for Rierson knows, too. And he could know what Rierson told him; what Rierson might have told him to protect the judge from you."

"But if Rierson knows anything against Tania—Tania, whom he must hate since she fooled him, posed as his secretary and gave me the opportunity of robbing his safe—why hasn't he acted?"

Zee Clarke raised her shoulders. "Rierson threatened the Reckoner; threatened to expose Tania to the police unless he returned those stolen documents and quit hounding him."

"And the Reckoner wouldn't do it, of course." Marty remembered the Reckoner's refusal once before to meet Rierson's demand, to save Tania's life. "The why didn't Rierson strike?"

Zee Clarke said, and her voice was either tired or disinterested: "The Reckoner would not save the one to sacrifice the many. At least, he wouldn't then. Rierson didn't expose her for several reasons. One, that he might use Tania to influence you, if not the Reckoner. Two, because the knowledge that he has about Tania may be simply knowledge; not evidence. He is waiting until the truth he carries in his head can be placed on paper and become legal evidence. When Max heard the judge was shot and his naming of you as the guilty party he believed it." She looked at him steadily now. "It was natural."

MARTY'S attempted smile was not much of a success. "I didn't know," he said simply. "Tania's name was not mentioned by the judge. It doesn't matter much if you believe it or not."

"No." Zee Clarke looked at him. And then, "Would you have done it for her, Marty?"

"Murder! Shoot a defenseless man? Why—"

She was watching him very sharply. Then she took two quick steps. "You could have if you really love her. I—" She hesitated, her whole attitude changed. She walked quickly to the hidden door, manipulated picture and panel. "There is much to be done; you need rest. You will not be disturbed."

"Knight!" Marty said, as he moved onto the flight of stairs. "Can I—?"

"There is a phone in your rooms—a private number. Entirely separate from all other phones in the house. Good night!"

Marty hesitated a long time on those stairs, facing her. She was very beautiful, very— But the amber eyes now were cold and—yes, perhaps sinister. There was something hard and cruel to those narrow lips; something in the eyes that— And Marty realized that whatever it was it was not for him. Although she faced him she was not watching him; those eyes were not looking into his.

"Good night, Zee," he said very low.

And for a long moment his black eyes looked straight into those amber balls that did not see him. Then Marty went slowly up the steps. Twice he turned. Zee Clarke was still there, still watching—watching what? Then the panel closed noiselessly behind him. He was in the oddly furnished room, alone. He closed the door and locked it. He felt very much alone—and he was wanted for murder!

Thoughts! Many of them; none encouraging. He saw again the eyes of Max Arnold; searching, speculative, suspicious. Arnold didn't believe him, and now feared him; feared his capture. Zee Clarke didn't believe him, and she, too, feared his capture.

And, Tania! She believed him. Marty knew that. But, Tania—Tania and Arnold!

The bedroom. No use to go in there, Marty thought. He'd never sleep that night. The thing was impossible. He would get in touch with Knight. He dialed

the hotel. Knight was not there, had not even registered at the hotel. There was a curtain close to the bed, a little recess behind it. There was a dressing gown there, pajamas—slippers even.

Marty undressed slowly, then stretched out on the bed.

Five—ten minutes, perhaps, while wild chaotic thoughts raced through his mind. Then sleep Marty thought impossible came.

WHEN Marty awoke, light was blazing down in his eyes. The sun? He rubbed a hand across his eyes, suddenly remembered where he was and that there could be no sun, and sat bolt upright in bed. The little lamp on the table beside his bed was shining in his eyes; directly in his eyes. The shade was tilted, too. Someone had been in his room then. And a voice spoke from the living room beyond.

"You'll find everything in the bathroom; razor, shaving cream—everything you can need. Then breakfast out here with me." A door closed, and Marty jumped out of bed. It was Zee Clarke.

A shave, a shower, a good rub-down could not and did not drive the thoughts from Marty's head. They were still there, unpleasant and disturbing as the night before, when he walked into the living room.

A card table was set up in the middle of the room. Grape fruit, plates and— That was all Marty saw as he grabbed up a morning paper.

The story was there all right. Fearfully, yet eagerly Marty scanned the headlines for his name. Then he ran his eyes quickly over the fine print; turned the pages. His name was not there. He went through the columns, then sat down and read every word carefully.

"Forget it, Marty." Zee Clarke came in, took the paper from him and tossed it over on the couch. "Somehow we'll straighten things out. If you have to skip,

you have to skip. At least, you're safe here for the time being.

"What do you hear—besides the papers; anything?" he demanded.

"Nothing. No leak has come out that you are wanted for murder. At least, Max hasn't found any—and Max is good."

"But the Reckoner?"

"He hasn't—" She stopped suddenly. "I haven't seen him yet. I will later. Don't you worry. I'm rich, Marty. Money will do anything, and the Reckoner has many channels open for your escape. Just forget it." She smiled. "We'll spend our time getting acquainted."

"But, Knight—"

Zee Clarke shook her head, pushed him into the chair by the table. "It's the first time I ever waited on a man, Marty," she said as she poured the coffee. "And, do you know—I rather like it."

ALL that day Marty spent alone. Not a word from Knight, Zee Clarke did not visit him; and worst of all, he did not see Tania. It was just before seven o'clock that Zee Clarke barged in on Marty, took him quickly to the room below and left him as Max Arnold came. Marty wanted to ask him about Tania, but he didn't.

Max Arnold was not encouraging and not overly friendly, Marty thought.

"No leaks on this case," he told Marty. "The fact that your name has not appeared startles and alarms me. They must be pretty sure of your arrest very shortly for the police to keep the news from the papers; from certain trusted officials even."

"But I am wanted?" said Marty.

"Yes, you're wanted all right. Wanted badly." And after a long moment, "Lieutenant Bradley spent some time with the commissioner. It is quite possible that you are wanted quietly; to be brought in secretly. It is quite possible that you may

even be offered—offered—” Beady eyes set straight on Marty; hard eyes. There was more than suspicion in them. Speculation.

“You needn’t be afraid I’ll talk. What does the Reckoner say—think?”

“He must think as I think,” said Max suddenly. “That from now on, certainly you can be of no further use to him; only a danger.”

Marty wet his lips. “And what does he intend to do about that?” Marty didn’t like the look in those eyes; the hardness of Arnold’s voice as he said, “you need have no fear. You will be removed to a place of safety.”

Max Arnold stepped back. He walked around behind Marty, toward the door. But in the glass that hung on the wall Marty saw his face, the cold sternness of it—a sudden sort of determination. But mostly he saw that corrugated right hand; saw it raise slowly and slip beneath his jacket; beneath his left—

Marty whirled, started forward—and stopped. The door opened; Max Arnold’s hand dropped to his side. Zee Clarke spoke.

“We haven’t had dinner yet. Marty must be starving,” she said. And those amber eyes settling on Max Arnold, “I have arranged things with the Reckoner. Marty leaves the country tomorrow night.”

“He doesn’t. He can’t. Why, you—”
“You—what?” Amber eyes shot fire.

Max Arnold hesitated, and then, “Your life may depend upon his silence; his assured silence.” There was a threatening note in his voice, a deadliness to his eyes, and the hand again was moving slowly beneath his jacket.

Queer, Marty thought. Was it possible that this man was going to kill him? This lawyer, whose cleverness Marty had to admire despite his unsavory reputation. A man who had cleared more men of crime

than any other, perhaps any other ten lawyers in the city. Now did Max Arnold see the same danger to himself that he had seen so often to others? But Zee Clarke was talking.

“I am going with Marty,” she said, and Max Arnold turned and looked at her. His eyes widened. And then very slowly and very carefully Zee Clarke finished. “And Tania remains behind.”

That was all. The woman had grasped Max Arnold’s arm and led him from the room.

Marty took three quick steps forward and then stopped. What had been in Max Arnold’s eyes when Zee Clarke finished her sentence?

CHAPTER EIGHT

“K”

ZEE CLARKE had dinner with him. That was two hours later. And in that two hours Marty had decided to play a different game—a waiting game. He’d pretend to agree to anything Zee Clarke suggested; at least, until the moment came to act upon that suggestion.

“Passports and everything will be arranged, Marty,” she told him when she left him. “I’ll have a lot to do—a lot of packing.”

“But the Reckoner! Won’t he— Max Arnold distrusts me. He’d rather see me dead. He’ll suggest that to the Reckoner if he doesn’t carry it out himself, or get—”

“No,” she broke in. “The Reckoner, Max and myself agree that the thing to do is to get you out of the country. It’s the thing for you, too, Marty. If the real murderer can be found, then we can return. Max agrees that you shall go; he’s arranging things.”

“But are you certain?” Marty followed her to the door. “He seemed so—so sure I was a danger. What made him change his mind?”

"Don't you know?" Zee Clarke laughed, stretched both her hands up and placed them on his shoulders, to drop them again almost at once. "It was when I told him that Tania remained behind."

"Oh," said Marty. "Max Arnold must have great influence with the Reckoner."

"More than anyone in the world."

"He fears—fears Arnold then."

"He fears him far less than—than he fears me. Indeed, I know of no man that the Reckoner probably counts on more and fears less. Till tomorrow then. We leave early in the morning." And she turned and left him.

Marty paced his rooms. Of course he should get out of the city. That was the sensible thing to do. Yes—if it wasn't for Tania. It was after midnight before he had one constructive thought, but that thought was a good one; a damn good one. He knew the private phone number where he could reach the Reckoner, if anything important turned up. That is, anything important to the Reckoner. He remembered how the Reckoner had received some of his calls, when they were important only to Marty—and Tania.

Marty grinned. But this call would be important to the Reckoner. The Reckoner had once told him, and Marty had resented it terribly at the time, that some day, for his good service, his reward would be Tania. Marty would inform him diplomatically that if anything happened to Tania in his absence; that if she did not join him in his exile, then he would give to Lieutenant Bradley all the information he had concerning the Reckoner. Not much, maybe; not enough to destroy the Reckoner, but enough to destroy his aids—at least destroy Max Arnold.

Would the Reckoner act on that? Marty smiled as he reached for the phone. Max Arnold was important to the Reckoner.

AS Marty's hand stretched out for that phone, it rang—sharply, suddenly. Someone was calling him. Tania? He hoped so. It was quite possible, for she was in the room when Zee Clarke gave that number to Max Arnold.

But it wasn't Tania. It was Knight; the slow voice of his servant, Knight.

"I got the number from Miss Tania," Knight told him. "I couldn't go to the hotel because I was followed. But I'm an old lag at that game," (Marty had picked Knight up years before, on the streets of London) "and soon gave them the slip. I've been busy, sir, very busy; too busy to call. Now I have something to report. I want to tell you, sir, that if you don't hear from me again I'll be—be dead."

"Dead—dead! What happened? Knight, tell me!" Had the phone clicked; had Knight hung up, or—

But Knight was talking again.

"It's Miss Tania, sir. They've got her."

"Who—who? Rierson?"

"No, not him—now. Don Parks."

"Where are you?" Marty almost shouted the words, then caught himself and lowered his voice. "I'm coming."

"I'm up in the Bronx. I'll come—" And Knight gave a street corner. "I'll meet you there. Just hurry, sir, or I'll have to go alone."

"You know where she is; where Parks is?"

"No, sir, I don't." Despite that steady, polite "sir" of Knight's Marty caught the undertone of excitement. "But I think Mr. Rierson will tell me, and—"

"Rierson! Don't be a fool. He's the worst. Of course he won't tell you, Knight."

"You don't think so, sir? I think he will; I think he'll be very glad to. I understand your life may depend on it, and certainly Miss Tania's. Excuse me, sir."

There was a click, and silence.

The Reckoner, Max Arnold, Zee

Clarke all were forgotten. Threats, cleverness, his great constructive thought were all gone. Just one thing now. To save Tania. And, Knight? What did he mean, Rierson would tell him.

Marty Day was acting while he was thinking. His hat and cane, nothing more as he sought that linen closet in his bedroom. The hat, so as not to make him conspicuous if seen on the streets, the cane—well, he gripped it firmly. He hoped that he might find a use for it that night; a deadly use for it.

He was through the linen closet, down that hall; his flash sending a pencil of light along the darkness. Then the window. It opened easily, shot upward. Marty snapped out his light. Yet there was no sudden darkness. A brighter light than his was shining in his face. Zee Clarke stood back in the blackness.

"What are you doing, Marty? You—"

"I've got to go," he told her quickly. "This seemed the best way, and—"

"It's Tania." And when, sensing trouble, Marty shook his head, "Why lie to me? Knight just called you up."

MARTY hung his cane in his sleeve, beneath his arm. "You lied to me then. You told me the phone was private." Both his hands were on the window sill; he was bracing himself to swing up.

"I couldn't let you make a fool of yourself," she said, and then, "Put a foot over that sill and I'll place a bullet in it."

"Zee!" He hesitated. "You'd shoot me? You! After what you said?"

"I'd put a bullet in your leg, anyway." She didn't raise her voice. It was very calm; very determined. "Don't you see, Marty? It is a trap, and—"

"You think so?" Marty dropped back to the floor. "I thought of that too, Zee. I thought of it. But—"

"Of course it is." She moved a step nearer now and lowered the light, but he

could not see her plainly. Just a dull figure; a white arm, a white hand too, with something black in it; something black that was pointing toward him.

"But it was Knight's voice. It sounded like— Damn it, Zee!" Marty stepped closer to her, "You know Knight; you've heard him talk. What do you think?" He took another step. If he could get the woman off her guard! Just a quick lunge forward, a grab at the gun; then— He thought of his cane that he gripped firmly, but that would hurt. The twist of her wrist or the sudden pound of fine steel upon her delicate white knuckles! He didn't want to hurt her; didn't want—

"What do I think?" she said. "I think you take me for a fool. Stand back!" This as he moved another step. "You took a gun from me once, but I didn't want to shoot you then. Now—"

And Marty did it; he had to do it. The cane seemed to slip through the palm of his hand, along his fingers, stop suddenly as the curved handle facing upward reached the girl's wrist. It was doubtful if she saw it at all until the curved steel turned suddenly and shot down with the speed of a striking rattler. Just for a split second it encircled that wrist, then her hand was jerked toward the wall.

There was the single roar of a gun, the smell of powder in the small hall. The gun left her hand, hit the wall, bounced off it and thudded upon the floor. A dead silence, followed by a single surprised curse from the girl as her right hand went to her mouth. Then the cane swept back and twisted the flash from her left hand.

He heard the girl's sharp intake of breath as he jumped for the window; heard her words plainly too, as he stretched his body down from the stone sill.

"I forgot about that damned cane," she had said.

And that damned cane! The curved handle of it was hooked upon the heavy

rough stone below the window, held there by the weight of Marty's body. Held perilously there, slipping toward the edge.

Quickly and easily Marty let his hands slide down that strong smooth steel. He looked up once and saw a blotch of whiteness that might have been a face. He drew up his body, let its full weight drop quickly. There was a whirring sound as the hidden springs of steel came alive. The cane seemed to jump into the air; the handle left the window. And Marty Day, knees bent, body relaxed, dropped easily to the grassy bank below.

NO lights popped up in that great stone mansion. The face was gone from the window. Gone! Why? Gone, because the woman was running down the stairs to head him off? Gone, because she was searching in that hall for the gun that had been twisted from her hand?

Reason told Marty that she would not shoot him. But instinct told him something else; pointed out to him, too, the stone wall and the street beyond, for Zee Clarke was a strange—a very strange and a very dangerous woman.

No shot crashed into the night, no voice cried hoarsely in the blackness. Just the darkness of the big house. But Zee Clarke had heard that message. Would she act on it? Would she notify the Reckoner; Max Arnold? Why should she? Marty nodded. There was a danger for him out there in the night and hence a danger to the others; a danger, at least, as Max Arnold would see it. Still, as he dashed down the street and flagged a cruising taxi he didn't hear a car roar from the drive of that old stone house.

Marty snapped his orders to the driver, promised a ten spot for speed and was thrown back on the seat as the chauffeur, having almost forgotten what a ten looked like, bent every effort to refresh his memory.

Marty sat on the edge of that seat, holding his cane tightly in both hands. Street lights flashed in and out on him; hundreds of them, perhaps, before he suddenly realized that he was a wanted murderer. Then he slunk back into a corner of the reeling cab. But such thoughts were nonsense. No one would see him to recognize him.

He looked back, watching for a speeding car; Zee Clarke coming in the same direction. But there was no car. He was fearful too of another kind of a car, a car with a screeching siren, a car with— He tried to smile. He knew now the feeling of other men, men he had hunted, men wanted for murder. He shook his head then. Did a murderer feel as he felt; one really guilty of murder? And then one thought. Not to be caught; not to be discovered before he reached Knight; reached Tania.

THE Bronx at last; the long, deserted street; the corner beyond that where he was to meet Knight.

"Don't you want to go to some definite place?" the driver said as Marty alighted before a great vacant lot overgrown with weeds, tumbled-down shacks far back.

"No!" Marty snapped, and handed the driver twenty instead of ten. "The extra money is for the speed back downtown," he said.

"Sure. Sure!" The driver pocketed the money, swung the car quickly, backed it once and turned around.

Marty glanced up and down that street. Not a soul; not even a cop. He walked briskly across the street from the deserted lot, and rounding the corner walked down a block lined with brick, walk-up apartments. On this street he was to meet Knight.

And he thought he saw him. No, the man wasn't Knight. He had a slouch, a shuffling to his walk, a bend to his shoulders, a furtiveness, as if he watched and

feared; as if at any moment he would run for it, or dash into one of the numerous alleyways beside the buildings and disappear.

Was he watching Marty? And he was. Turning quickly, Marty saw the man pause down by the corner and look back over his shoulders, trying to study him in the darkness. Then he disappeared around that corner.

Was it just a coincidence? Was this just a drifter, a denizen of the night, curiously aroused by Marty's presence there on the lonely street? And another thought; a sudden, perhaps enlightening one. Was this man an emissary of Knight's; a man who was to take him to Knight, Knight fearing that Marty might be followed?

Marty nodded grimly. Well, he'd soon find out if this man had a real interest in him or if the interest was just in Marty's imagination; the panicky imagination of a hunted—yes, a haunted man.

Marty crossed the street, saw that the entire block as far as the corner was deserted, and stepped quickly down the few steps of an areaway. That was the second time in two nights that Marty had hidden in an areaway, but before spitting lead had rolled him in. Now—

His eyes narrowed, his lips set tight. He gripped his cane firmly as, lying there on those steps, he peered cautiously around the stone balustrade above the sunken basement entrance and saw the slouching figure approaching.

The man moved faster now. He looked up and down the street, across it even. Then he broke into a run—a nervous, tottering run. Marty nodded his satisfaction. The man had missed him and was alarmed.

His feet moved faster as he neared Marty, feet that seemed unused to such rapid motion. He reached Marty, stopped suddenly, swung around, made gurgling

noises and clutched at his throat. The next instant he was jerked violently into that areaway, stumbled upon the steps and would have fallen had not Marty caught him.

Jerking the handle of his cane from the man's neck and slipping it over the crook in his arm was a single motion to Marty. Then his hands fastened tightly on the lapels of the man's jacket.

"Come! Out with it." Marty shook the man. "What— Why were you watching me?"

"Me—watching you? Yeah, Bo—that's it. 'The man with the cane,' the lad said. But I didn't think as how—"

"What 'lad' said?" Marty started to shake him again but stopped.

"I don't know, I don't know. He said to give you this note." The man opened a dirty hand in which was clutched a folded sheet torn from a note book. "He said you'd give me fifty dollars for it." And with a wink, "I guess that was hop talking, but I'd take ten."

Marty grasped the note from the man's hand, was reading it beneath his flash. And the first thing that caught his eye was the big "K"—that peculiar "K" of Knight's. The note read simply.

I am trusting this man with the note. I have to. I did not dare to wait longer. Anyway, he don't know the lady's husband and can't tell him. But the lady is waiting for you at—here Knight gave a careful description of how to find the place—it's an old warehouse. She's there. Make it quick.

K.

Marty nodded. Of course the fellow had read the note. But it wouldn't mean anything to him. Just a date with a woman, he'd think.

"Did you read this?" Marty peeled off five tens and shoved them into the grasping hand.

"Not me," said the man, "not me." He

backed up the steps as Marty told him to be on his way. And when he reached the top step, "I'd of gone myself, Governor, only I forgot to wear my soup-and-fish. Good luck with the lady. I hope her husband don't wake up and look around."

And the man was gone, clutching the money tightly, as if he expected someone to take it from him.

CHAPTER NINE

The Single Shot

KNIGHT was clever, Marty thought as he hurried in the direction that was given him. Knight couldn't have done else, of course, if he had to leave. He couldn't very well get an envelope and seal it at that time of the morning. And Knight had to leave in a hurry. Why? One reason only. Tania was not only in danger, but immediate danger.

No other thoughts. Marty walked rapidly now; he dared not run. Even at that time of the morning there were several people abroad, and once he saw a cop. Did the cop see him? For a single moment Marty stopped dead, half started to slink toward an apartment, caught himself in time, and straightening his body, swung back his shoulders and walked down the street swinging his cane.

Turning the corner and out of the officer's line of vision Marty took advantage of the vacant lot. There was a path through it. He found it easily and his feet moved quickly. Sheds, stumps of trees threw strange shadows about him. Then the warehouse. A huge gloomy affair; ugly and incongruous against a background of row upon row of brick apartments. Close in the shadows of the huge squat building Marty moved. Broken windows that were boarded! Some with loose boards that could be jerked from their position; others with great gaping holes and broken glass, where

neighborhood boys had already found an entrance. Plenty of places to enter but no light from within; at least, no light that Marty could find.

Time was passing and still he circled the building. Strange shadows! More than once Marty thought that he saw a figure in the darkness, and more than once he swung quickly as he felt sure he heard steps.

But always he discovered nothing. Nerves? Perhaps. But Marty did not like to admit that. He had never recognized nerves before, but now—

And he saw it. Sunken, between two sagging small outbuildings, was a narrow dirt passage, and at the end of that passage a door; a door that was partly open. Marty discovered when he picked his way carefully to it. He leaned close to the door and listened, pushed it gently, but stopped at once. Rotten wood groaned, then protested in an angry squeak.

Well, there was room for a body to slip through that opening. Maybe Knight's body already had. Marty turned sideways, jerked his torch into his left hand and squeezed through the narrow opening. A dark, damp, ill-smelling place; and silent, deadly silent! He stood still, listening. Then turning his torch toward the cold hard ground he sent a beam of light straight—straight— And he jumped back, then leaned forward again.

The light shone on the body of a man—a man bound hand and foot with strong rope. There was an ugly welt on his forehead, a gag across his mouth.

The watchman? Marty drew his knife and bent quickly, then hesitated. Watchman! The building didn't look as if it ever had a watchman. The man was breathing, all right. His nose was flat, his nostrils wide; there was no danger of suffocation there. Watchman! After all,

he might be a watcher; a watcher for those above, who had the girl; had Tania. And Knight had surprised him?

MARTY moved his torch, biting into the darkness. There were steps; rotten, wooden steps leading to the floor above; broken, hanging, some even missing. For a moment only Marty turned and looked down at the bound man. He wished then that he had a gun; he wished that he had taken the gun from Zee Clarke, snatched it from the floor there in the narrow hall. But even as he made the wish, reason told him that such a move might have been disastrous. One that not only took time—time he could not spare—but one that might have prevented his making this trip tonight. Zee Clarke might have grabbed him, cried out; screamed a warning to others in that house.

Screamed! And Marty jerked erect, tossed up his torch and dashed toward those wooden steps. Would they hold him? Could he, at that speed, find and jump the missing steps; jump too the rotten ones that would give under his weight? Could he— But he didn't think of that as he dashed up those steps.

Scream! Yes, there had been a scream; a weird, eery scream of fear; perhaps horror. Just once. Short, sharp, terrible to Marty; and it died away. It was the scream of a girl; the girl, Tania.

Marty stopped; stopped because his head crashed against wood; wood that luckily gave slightly, or he would have been thrown back down those stairs. He felt the crack all right, but it knocked some sense into his head. It wouldn't help Tania any if he went stumbling, blundering into deadly gunfire—the gunfire of Don Parks.

Slowly now, very slowly Marty lifted the trap door above his head. And then Marty was out on the rough wooden floor,

crawling along it, coming to his feet, moving more quickly across the open loft guided by a single light; sliver of light that came from a partly open door. A heavy wooden crate, then a wooden upright smacked him back. But he went on, reached that door and peered into the room beyond.

The first thing he saw was another door across the room from him, just an oblong well of blackness. Then he saw Tania. She was crouched there on the floor, her hands tied behind her back, her feet bound at the ankles; but she was not gagged. Great brown eyes were wide with fear—no, terror—and she was staring at something, fascinated. Marty saw the shadow on the floor, saw it move and become a man. The man was Don Parks; Parks, who was wanted for murder.

Parks ran his finger across the blade of a sharp knife as he looked at the girl. Then he placed the gun that was dangling from a finger of his left hand, upon a crate.

"Listen, sweetheart," he said as he leaned over her. "Can you write?" And when she only stared at him, "Damn it! can you write?"

"Yes. Why?" The words stuck in Tania's throat.

"Because," said Parks, bobbing his head, "if you don't tell me the name of the Reckoner you'll have to write it down for me later. Know why?" His face was very close to the girl's as Marty, gripping his cane tightly, slowly squeezed into that room.

"I'm an original man," Parks laughed hoarsely, his evil eyes on the girl; watching, even gloating over the effect of his words, so that he didn't hear the stealthy movement of Marty's body. "Can't guess why you won't talk? Well—" he jabbed the knife close to her mouth, even against her lips—"you can't talk without a tongue, sister."

QUICK thoughts raced through Marty's head. His hand that gripped the cane was steady. Could he throw that cane and strike Parks? Certainly. He knew that he could do that with a single motion of his right hand. But could he throw it so that it would strike Parks a paralyzing blow? Yes, he thought so. He had done it before; many times, perhaps during his years in the East, but never where so much hung in the balance; never where the deadly accuracy of his trained hand and wrist was so much needed. If he missed— But he couldn't altogether. He could follow it up with a rush. His right hand went up, the cane swished slightly through the air—and Parks turned his head. But too late, Marty thought. Then the cane never left his hand. A hand from behind grabbed his arm; something round and hard was jammed into his back and a voice said: "First, Knight comes here; then you. What's the racket, Mr. Day?"

Marty recognized the voice; recognized it as he was forced into the light of that room; recognized it as Don Parks reached out quickly and lifted his revolver from the crate. The voice behind him was that of Lieutenant Frank Bradley, but it was the voice of Don Parks that spoke now.

"Don't move, Mr. Marty Day," he sneered, "or I'll put a bullet between them pretty black eyes of yours."

Bradley's hand had left Marty's arm after jerking it to his side. Parks hadn't seen him at first, and now Bradley shot his gun along Marty's side and covered Parks.

"I don't think we'll have any shooting, Don," he said quietly. "Mr. Day is big and well built. I doubt if you could get a bullet through him that would hit me. If you want to get him, of course, why—"

And Parks didn't. His gun swung

down quickly and the nose struck against the side of Tania's head.

"Bradley, eh?" Parks fairly sneered the words. "Drop your gun or the girl is blasted out!" And when no gun fell to the floor, "I'll do it all right. I know the racket; know that I'll be wanted for murder as soon as the evidence comes through. He'll tell you." He nodded toward Marty. "The Reckoner is going to produce it. Come! Drop that gun. I can't fry but once, you know."

"Yes, yes." Marty gasped the words as he stood there, a shield for Bradley and looked into the eyes of a killer. "Drop the gun, Bradley; let him go. You've got to, for the girl."

"I'll count three, Parks," said Bradley slowly. "Then I'll shoot. Believe that!"

"You—" Parks' gun stayed against the girl's head; his eyes were riveted on the gun Bradley held close to Marty's side. "I can see your hand, Bradley—the trigger finger. Just even tighten it, and —"

"One—" said Bradley very slowly.

"God!" cried Parks, "don't be a fool. You don't believe I mean it?"

"I've got my duty, mean it or not." Bradley's voice was very hard, very tense. But Marty knew the truth. He was going to shoot; going to shoot, and Tania would die. Marty didn't think, then, that the man who could save him; the man who might confess to the murder of Judge Ramdelfia, was going to die too. He thought only of Tania.

"Bradley—don't!" He fairly shrieked the words. Then he moved his body suddenly. Too late, he thought. The shot had come, echoing and re-echoing through that small room. Marty's eyes were held on Tania's face; Tania's dead face he feared. But it wasn't dead. Her eyes were staring straight up at Don Parks. Marty moved his head. Even as he looked, Parks was diving forward; diving

straight toward the floor, the gun still grasped in his hand. But he didn't use it; couldn't use it. Marty realized the very second before Parks hit the floor that he was dead. He saw it for that single moment, saw those glassy, sightless, dead eyes.

"You got him." Marty grabbed Bradley by the arm. "Great shooting! I—"

Bradley tore himself loose. "You fool," he cried, "I didn't shoot. You blocked that. The shot came from the darkness of that door beyond; just behind him. I saw the flash. It was the Reckoner or—"

"Or Rierson," said Marty as he knelt at the girl's side and slashed at her ropes. "It couldn't have been the Reckoner; he didn't know. But Rierson feared Parks would talk. Rierson knew where he was." He thought of Knight's message and bit off his words. But there was no need to bite them off. Marty was talking to— Well, certainly not to Bradley. Lieutenant Bradley had jumped over the dead body of Parks and was out into the warehouse.

MARTY cut the girl free. She was trying to talk; finally her dry lips formed words. "He was the man who killed the judge, and now— You, Marty; you had better leave. Run for it while Bradley—"

And Bradley was back in the room, his gun swinging in his hand. "That ends the Parks case," he said with a shrug of his shoulders. "Too bad; we'd have roasted him sure."

"But my case! You—"

"No." Bradley looked up suddenly and he grinned. "It doesn't end yours; not by a jugful. Come on! We'd better get moving. Down to headquarters, of course." He answered the question in Marty's eyes. "If you expected that guy to help you out by confessing, you're certainly out of luck as far as he's concerned." And suddenly, "Your word of

honor not to attempt to escape, Mr. Day, or I'll have to use handcuffs."

"No, I won't try to escape. And, Tania!"

Bradley shrugged. "She better come along." He looked hard at the girl. "She's not under arrest, but it's to her interest."

"I'll go where—where Marty goes."

"How did you know; get here?" Marty asked Bradley.

"Well," said Bradley, "a guy that signs his name with a big 'K' picked out the wrong bird to give a note to. Oh, he wasn't a dick, but he does 'stool' occasionally for the boys; did for me when I used to work up this way; does a bit yet. Anyway, he got that note and buzzed me on the wire. A clever note, Mr. Day; just one bad line in it. Not a sure-fire line, but enough to get me out of bed and make me trot up to the Bronx. Then I hid across the street, recognized you and followed you. I'll admit I made a bull in coming in and grabbing your arm. But when I saw the guy wrapped up downstairs—well, I thought it was your racket."

"And the one bad line that made you suspect the note was for me?"

"Well," Bradley rubbed his chin, "'suspect' is not the word. I earned my promotion by being persistent; not bright, just persistent. I follow up even the least sign of a clue. This bird who telephoned me said the guy who gave him the note told him to watch for a man with a cane. You always carry one, and—"

They were out in the loft now, walking toward the door, when a hand—in fact, two hands out of the darkness—grabbed Marty's sleeve. Marty turned, opened his mouth to speak and stopped. There, wedged between a packing case and the wall, was a man; a man who spoke; spoke though Marty could see a white cloth bound across his mouth.

"Don't talk, and cut my bonds—"

quick." The voice was the voice of Knight. Marty cut those bonds. They seemed loose, very loose. But Knight appeared very much frightened, and even took the knife from Marty's hand to hack more—much more than was necessary, Marty thought, to free himself.

"What the hell is this?" Bradley swung back. And, Knight, breathing heavily; apparently frightened into stuttering, tried to explain.

"I was following Miss Tania, to protect her, maybe, in Mr. Day's absence, when this man took her. I sent word for Mr. Day, and came here. I wanted to protect her. And that awful man caught me and struck me and tied me. Oh, sir—I hope, sir, he's dead."

What was the matter with Knight, Marty wondered. He had never seen him like that; never seen him in a blue funk before. Now—

But Bradley was saying: "He's dead all right; deader than hell." And as they went down the stairs to the street, "Damn it! quite a coincidence, this. The second time a lad has taken the lead when I—" And his words were lost, muffled in his throat.

CHAPTER TEN

Knight and Day

THE police system works smoothly and efficiently. A few minutes later a police car was at the warehouse and Bradley had given sharp orders about the body above, and to hold the bound man at the foot of the stairs.

"I'll be back before the photographers and medical examiner arrive," he told the police sergeant.

Five minutes after that Tania, Marty and Knight were waiting in a taxi while Bradley telephoned. Thoughts? Yes, many of them as Tania snuggled close to him. Funny, that! Bradley leaving him

there on his honor. Not that he'd run out, but that Bradley would place such a trust in a man wanted for murder!

The taxi shot downtown, but not to headquarters. It stopped right before Marty's apartment house.

"You can pay the charge," said Bradley easily. "Then I'm going above with you. I've got a proposition to make."

Upstairs, Bradley lighted a cigar, willingly accepted the drink that Marty somewhat doubtfully offered him and threw himself into a big chair. After Knight served it and disappeared, "Let the young lady stay here with you." Bradley puffed lazily. "I've got a proposition to make, Mr. Day. You see, a certain man was murdered; a well-known judge. Before he died he made an accusation. I am the only one who heard it." He leaned forward and narrowed his eyes as he looked at Marty. "Now—for a consideration I'll forget that I heard it and we'll hand the murder on this Don Parks."

"He did it," said Marty. "He did it."

And Tania cut in sharply. "That's right. He killed Judge Ramdelfia. He told me so there when he threatened to—to—" and when Bradley grinned at her, "I'm willing to go on the stand and swear to that."

"Sure. Sure!" Bradley was affable. "And very natural of you too. But it wouldn't wash. The ante-mortem statement of the judge would go further with the jury; especially when there's a feeling with that jury that you love Mr. Day. Now," he sent rings of smoke toward the ceiling—"love's a beautiful thing. It softens the heart of even an old dick. Come! Give me the name of the Reckoner and I'll forget the judge ever made a certain statement."

"You. You!" Marty rasped. "After you would have let Tania die for what you call duty."

"Well—" Bradley reddened slightly—"I'm making you a simple proposition; not giving a lecture on the ethics of the department."

"Even if I did know," said Marty, "I—"

"Gangster's code!" Bradley sneered. And to the girl, "Do you want Mr. Day? I don't care who peeps. I want the Reckoner."

The girl shook her head. "I don't know—don't know." Her words were very low.

"Stubborn and foolish!" Bradley took his cigar from his mouth, looked long and steadily at the shreds on the end, and then, "Well—I'll smoke five minutes, by the clock."

"Then?" It was Tania who spoke.

"Then I'll lift that phone across the room and call headquarters, and turn Mr. Day in."

"You haven't told, yet, that the judge accused me?" Marty gasped. Strange thoughts were in his head. The cane beside his chair and, with a gulp, his word of honor to Bradley!

"No." Bradley looked at the clock. "It's my secret for four more minutes. I just let the boys know I wanted to talk to you. Why are you staring like that?"

Marty was staring. For directly behind where Bradley sat were curtains to a small conservatory, and those curtains were parted. And through the thin slit could be seen the eyes of Knight; steady, glaring, unfrightened now. But that wasn't what bothered Marty. It was something else. Knight's hand was through that curtain; a hand that held a gun; a deadly, black, heavy automatic.

BRADLEY half turned his head and gun and eyes disappeared. But they were there yet. Marty came to his feet. If he called out. Knight too would be arrested. If he didn't call out, Knight might shoot. And the phone rang.

Tania lifted the receiver, turned. "It's for you, Lieutenant. Police headquarters."

"Good!" Bradley came slowly to his feet, and as he walked to the phone Marty slipped between him and the curtains. Then, as Bradley's voice came to him, just a word here and there, he pushed through those curtains; confronted Knight.

"God! Knight. You mustn't; you can't. It—"

"It's his life or yours," Knight said. "I heard him say no one else knew. Maybe, just a clout on the head and—"

And from the other room the dull voice of Bradley. "Is that so? Yeah. I can't tell you now. Let me know everything he said; I'm listening."

"Knight," Marty whispered softly, "what happened? How did you find Tania?"

"Like I told you, I was following Tania," Knight said. "She went to Rier-son's house and she didn't come out. I slipped around in the car I had hired to the block behind, was about to go through the yard back of Rier-son's when men came. Three of them; two were carrying the girl. They put her in a car. One man stayed behind, and as the car drove away he turned back toward the Rier-son house. I stuck a gun in his belly. It was Rier-son, and—"

He stopped short. Tania had called. Bradley had parted the curtains.

"Come back in here," he said to Marty. "Any orders you want to give your servant can be given before me. I'm treating you pretty good; you think I'm a sap, maybe."

"You've been very decent; not the hard-boiled dick you've been painted. I—even if you don't understand why, I appreciate it."

"It's because I want the Reckoner; want him bad. Now, don't give me the

line of the 'good he's doing.' A guy can't go around and shoot people right out of the electric chair. I'm not saying the Reckoner did it last time, with Razor Burke; but I am saying he did it this time."

"Why wasn't it Rierson? If Don Parks talked, it would have been the end of Rierson." Marty wished to defend the Reckoner. Any way, he didn't see how the Reckoner could have gotten there on time; could even know of the warehouse.

"Rierson couldn't do it." Bradley poked a finger into Marty's chest. "Rierson couldn't have been there. I just got a message from headquarters. They found Rierson in that vacant lot not far from the warehouse. He was tied—tied hand and foot by an expert. Gagged too. And his face was beaten into a pulp."

"What does Rierson say?" Marty was stunned.

"He's just regained consciousness and states that he went out for a breath of air, had a gun stuck in his side, was pushed into a car, and the next thing he knew—a cop was putting a light down on his face. That is what Rierson says. But my guess is that the Reckoner kidnaped him and wanted him to talk; wanted him to tell him something; maybe made him glad to tell something." He looked at Tania.

"Glad to tell him something." The words rang familiarly in Marty's ears. But where— And Bradley was talking.

"Get ready, Mr. Marty Day." He shoved a hand into a hip pocket and jerked out steel cuffs. "Now—will you or will you not tell me the name of the Reckoner?" He half raised a hand. "No more speeches, no more denials. Simply yes or no."

Marty straightened slightly, felt Tania close to his side, and stretching out both hands, said: "No!"

Bradley looked him straight in the eyes for a long moment, and then, "Just one

hand, Marty Day—just the right hand." He suddenly gripped it and shook hands with Marty. "Sometimes we cops have dirty jobs. I had one tonight. God, you must have thought me an awful fool to clown around with a guy wanted for murder!"

HE dropped Marty's hand and turned toward the door. Marty followed him, grabbed his shoulder, swung him around. "You're not arresting me; you're—you're letting me go free, knowing what—"

"Sure!" said Bradley. "Knowing exactly what. You see, the judge had raised his eyes and was looking over your shoulder when the shot came. It went right into his spine. He thought you had shot him in the stomach. The shock was great. He couldn't tell, of course."

"But how did you find out?" It was as if an iron hat, that had been screwed tightly on Marty's head, was suddenly released.

"The judge became conscious again and talked before the boys got there. When I told the judge he was shot through the back he knew you couldn't have done it. You see, the judge didn't know that Don Parks had been released, and he had never seen Parks; so he didn't know the man sent to his house to 'guard' him from you was Parks."

"Then you're not sure it was Parks?"

"But I am," said Bradley. "The judge pretty near slipped out on me, but I had an ambulance doctor jazz him up, and I wouldn't let them take him from the house until I got a picture of Parks there, for him to identify."

"But what made you think it was Parks?"

"You did, didn't you?" Bradley said. "Well—I get around a bit myself. I'll just take another drink of that stuff. It's good; damn good. No—no fizz water; I'll take it neat." And he did, walked

toward the door, turned once and said: "You had a tough squeeze, Marty Day, and a damn good break. A guy mustn't expect too many breaks in life. She's not a bad-looking girl, and there's plenty of country around."

"Any other advice," Marty was standing with his arm around Tania. His smile was boyish again.

"Just a bit," said Bradley, and although his words had a ring to them, his eyes were very cold and his lips very hard. "You've got a nose and you've got a thumb—and there's the Reckoner."

The door slammed and Lieutenant Bradley was gone. Marty was no longer wanted for murder. Who killed Don Parks? The Reckoner could hardly have been there. It was impossible for Rier-son to be there. And those words, "glad to tell." He remembered them; other things too. Knight bound in the warehouse; bound so loosely that a child might have jerked himself free! And Knight's anxiety; his eagerness to cut the ropes him- self; to leave nothing that might—might—Marty swung suddenly.

"Knight!" he called sharply.

Knight came. Quiet; nothing of nerv- ousness now that Bradley had gone.

"Knight—Marty shot his words quick- ly—"over the phone you said Rier-son would tell you where Tania was and—"

"And he did. He was most obliging." Knight nodded, and when Marty would

have cut in, "He didn't know who I was, sir, but I—well, I persuaded him to tell. Indeed, he was glad to tell me."

"And the ropes then, in the warehouse when Tania was—"

"Miss Tania was about to die, sir; yes, sir. I heard you and the lieutenant talk- ing about how the Reckoner or someone unknown shot this man, Parks. Very for- tunate, sir. There was nothing else to do but kill him."

"But, Knight—" The snap was gone out of Marty's voice; there was a lump in his throat.

"You've been through a lot, sir. I wouldn't talk about it, if I may make so bold as to suggest it, sir." And his un- emotional face breaking, his lips curving slightly, "May we forget the unpleas- antness of this evening just as in—" And Knight's voice broke for the moment. Then, "Like in Arabia, wasn't it, sir? Just Knight and Day."

"Knight and Day." Marty repeated the words with perhaps more feeling than he ever had before.

Knight nodded, raised his head and sniffed. "I was getting up a little snack for you and Miss Tania," he said. "You'll excuse me, sir; I wouldn't want it to burn."

Knight gone—Marty didn't think much of the future. He thought only that he wasn't wanted for murder—and that he was alone with Tania.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

THE DEVIL'S DOZEN

by

Maxwell Hawkins

A complete horror mystery featuring those amazing twins, the Brothers Jones, detectives extraordinary.

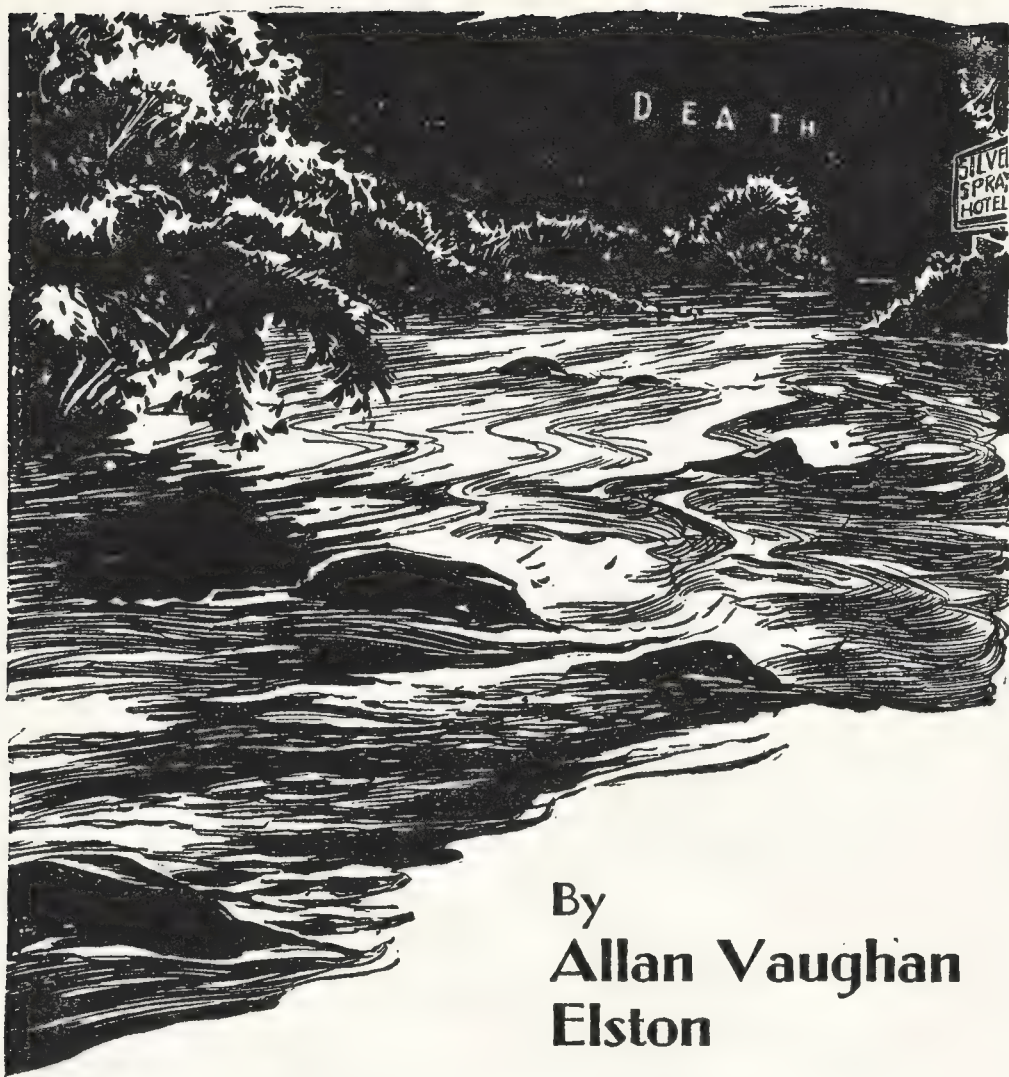
DIME DETECTIVE for DECEMBER 15th

Out DECEMBER 1st

Winking Death



"She was strangled," Shane said as the lights spelled out their message.



By
**Allan Vaughan
Elston**

In brilliant incandescence the word DEATH had flared from the electric sign over that terror lodge. And as the mazdas spelled out their murder message the body of Eva Fitch floated toward shore in the river below. Who was the ghastly joker who thus advertised his crime? Why had he blazoned his guilt in lights for the world to read?

CHAPTER ONE

Murder in Mazda

ARTHUR BAIRD and Patrick Shane trudged wearily up the left bank of the river. At a bend just below the hotel they paused for a moment to rest. They were hours late getting home; Baird, now glancing at his

radium wrist watch, noted that it was ten P. M.

"The next time you take me fishing, Art," Shane was complaining, "you'll have to sign a contract to get me back in time for supper."

Baird sat down, took off his waders and dumped sand from them. Beside him the river swirled noisily. For a half mile

upstream it was a straightaway of cascades and swift riffles, while here at this sharp bend to the right there was an eddying pool.

"Doctors," Shane remarked with apparent irrelevance, "as a rule are not flamboyant advertisers."

"Quack doctors are," Baird corrected, noting the direction of Shane's gaze.

"But how could even a quack get any business away out here in the woods?" objected Shane.

"A wilderness atmosphere is part of her bag of tricks," Baird explained. "She lines 'em up, too; been known to treat forty patients a day at ten dollars a throw. Makes 'em like it, they say. Lately her practice has fallen off."

"Those herb-and-pill rackets never last long," Shane agreed. He continued, however, to gaze with a degree of fascination at a distant sign in electric lights.

DR EVA FITCH

It shone from a spot a half mile up the river and on the opposite bank. Baird knew that Dr. Eva Fitch had faced her sign downriver because the state highway lay in this direction. Also the Silver Spray Hotel, where Baird and Shane were now staying, was down this way.

"She claims she was raised by Indians and knows all about herb remedies," Baird explained. "That, though, is a lot of bunk. Her background is Broadway. Her husband, Lionel Fitch, was once a circus ballyhooer. They're both good showmen."

Baird drew on his boots and started to move toward the hotel, which, brilliantly lighted, was only a hundred yards or so further up the river bank. But Shane made no move to follow. Instead, he had advanced to the water's edge and was peering at something the current was bearing downriver toward him.

A moment later the thing was swirled into the eddy at the bend.

"Great Jumping Jupiter!" breathed Patrick Shane, staring rigidly. What seemed to be the body of a woman was spinning in the toils of the eddy.

Shane, in hip waders, plunged into the water. Two thigh-deep strides took him to what was spinning there. Reaching it, he lifted a small white face clear of the stream and allowed the starlight to play upon it. A moment later he came floundering ashore with the stiff, cold body of a woman.

When it lay on the gravel at Baird's feet, he recognized Eva Fitch. Shane, bending over it, announced in a low voice: "She's dead."

The thing shocked Arthur Baird wretchedly, all the more because he had just been discussing Eva Fitch in a vein of flippancy.

"Drowned?" he asked miserably.

"No—murdered. She was throttled and tossed into the river. We don't know how far above here it happened. The current washed her body to this bend."

The most eery shock, however, was yet to come. It happened when Arthur Baird raised his eyes to gaze upriver at the distant sign which announced the victim's profession. Her house itself, at night, he could not discern. All he could see up there was a glitter of electric lights, spelling—

DR EVA FITCH

Ten bright letters!

Suddenly, in a wink, five of them went out. And the five which yet remained, gleaming with cruel and sinister irony down that half mile of wood-bound river, were—

D E A T H

THROUGH a dreary tension no sound intruded except a hoarse clatter of rushing water. And the night, in all directions but one, was a black void. Upriver were two sets of lights, one from

the hotel close by on this same bank, the other from the more distant house of Fitch whose sign was now so strangely, and with such grotesque aptness, blighted.

"She was strangled," Shane repeated.

Stooping, Baird himself now saw a red circle of flesh at the victim's throat; definitely it indicated strangulation by either a cord or a wire.

The woman, he saw, was garbed in a semi-formal dinner dress and wore neither hat nor gloves. The hair, unbobbed, was naturally in wild disarray. The features of the face were appealingly delicate; certainly there was nothing about them to suggest a charlatan.

Yet Baird knew that no city in the state would have given Eva Fitch a license to practice medicine. Time and again the ethical profession had exposed and denounced her quackeries—had literally driven her to the woods—

"Who else besides a husband," Shane was asking, "lived with her?"

"No one," Baird told him. "Their two servants, a native couple of good repute, go home to their own cabin over the hill late each afternoon. Doctor Fitch and her husband generally took supper at the hotel."

"How far is the Fitch place from the hotel?"

"Not quite half a mile. As a rule, I think, they walked back and forth."

"Crossing the river where?"

"On a plank auto bridge just this side of the Fitch lodge."

"Her dress is badly torn and she's bruised all over," Shane said. "Sharp rocks would do that, if the body was washed a long way down the current. Any still pools between here and the bridge?"

"None. It's swift, straight current from the bridge here. In fact—"

"Look!" Shane broke in, his voice startled. He was pointing upstream

toward the electric sign which now again became complete. Its five dark letters flashed on in a wink, the sign once more reading—

DR EVA FITCH

"You say her husband," Shane asked after a sober silence, "is an expert at showmanship? Would it be in his character to murder his wife, then brag about it by playing a trick with her sign?"

"I can't imagine anyone doing that."

"Let's lose no more time," Shane said. "I'll wait here with the body while you hurry on to the hotel. Phone the sheriff or nearest officer; tell him to come directly to this spot."

AWKWARDLY in his waders, Baird lumbered off up the river bank. The crime utterly confused him. He could imagine no motive for the murder of Eva Fitch, nor could he even foggily conceive why her electric sign should, with such cruel precision, announce her death.

The only thing his groping mind could grasp at the moment was that fortunately a keen talent was on hand to solve the mystery. Baird had known Patrick Shane for years. Today he had summoned his friend from Trenton for a day's fishing, Baird having for the past month been summering at the Silver Spray Hotel. And Shane, he knew, happened to be a criminal investigator of wide repute.

"Pat'll know all about it by morning," Baird assured himself as he reached the hotel porch.

The hostelry at one time had been one of the most popular resorts in the Pennsylvania mountains. It was now decadent. In its rather shabby lobby Baird, at this late hour, found only three people. One was Old Man Tarkio, a perennial guest with white hair and a club foot, who at this moment was dozing over a magazine. Another was a Negro porter.

The third was the dapper night clerk, Carewe, who, slim and sleek-haired, pen behind his ear, was standing at a north window from which there was a view up the river. He turned sharply at Baird's approach.

"Oh, it's you, is it, Mr. Baird? Odd thing about those lights up at the Fitch lodge! Did you notice them?"

"Please telephone the police," Baird said crisply. "Doctor Eva Fitch has just been found murdered."

Carewe stiffened. "What! Why, that sign of hers just—"

"Just spelled 'death,'" Baird supplied impatiently. "Let's get some action on it, quickly."

Carewe crossed the lobby to the telephone. Baird, keeping at his elbow, explained where the body had been found. A moment later Carewe was connected with the county sheriff.

The guest whom Baird knew as Old Man Tarkio and who had been dozing over a magazine came suddenly to life. The word "murder," spoken by Carewe with emphasis over the phone, had caught his ear. He arose and came spryly to the desk, his club foot clumping harshly on the tile floor of the lobby.

"Murder, you say?" he inquired shrilly. "Who did it? Was it here at the hotel?"

The intrusion annoyed Baird, who was trying to furnish Carewe with details so that Carewe could relay them over the phone. In the midst of that confusion, two other guests appeared. They entered at the front door and at first Baird thought they were both men. Then he saw that they were the stalwart, mannish Mrs. Abner Polk and her husband.

"Hoot owl, Abner? Nothing of the kind," the woman was saying. "It was a girl, I tell you. I know a girl's scream when I hear it."

"Did you hear a woman scream, Mrs.

Polk?" Baird asked, advancing to meet the newcomers.

"I most certainly did," Mrs. Polk affirmed, "but Abner here insists it was some bird or animal."

"Where were you?" Baird insisted.

"On the high bluff upriver, the place they call Pocono Rock." Mrs. Polk sat down, crossed her knickered legs, struck a match on the sole of her hiking boot and lit a cigarette.

"What time did you hear a scream?"

"It was about half past nine, wasn't it, Abner?"

"About that," Polk said, "but I'm sure it was only a—"

"From where," Baird cut in, "did the scream seem to come?"

"From the bridge," Mrs. Polk stated emphatically.

The only bridge, Baird knew, was nearly a half mile upriver and just this side of the Fitch lodge.

"No doubt," he said, "she was killed on the bridge."

"Killed? Who was killed?" Abner Polk asked quickly.

OLD MAN TARKIO cackled an answer. Having overheard the telephone call to the sheriff, he was equipped with the facts. "It was Eva Fitch," he proclaimed shrilly. "Her body was washed ashore at the bend, just below here, at ten o'clock."

"I told you so, Abner!" Mrs. Polk echoed. "Isn't it terrible? Oh, Mr. Loomis, have you heard? Eva Fitch has just been found, murdered."

"Murdered?" echoed a guest named Lester Loomis who had just entered the lobby. Baird knew him as a New York clubman, of high standing in the social register, who for the past week had sought quiet at this Pocono resort. What struck Baird now was that Loomis seemed to reel, as from a blow, at the announcement of murder.

"Have you been up that way, Mr. Loomis?" Baird asked, presuming that, since the man carried a walking stick, he had been for an amble.

Loomis sat down heavily. His hand trembled as he produced a handkerchief and mopped his brow. That the affair should so upset him amazed Baird. He knew Loomis as a man of poise, coldly self-possessed as a rule.

"Up what way?" Loomis answered evasively.

"Up toward the bridge at the Fitch lawn."

"No," Loomis said hoarsely. "Not that way. I don't know anything—" He broke off unconvincingly.

"Did you hear a woman scream?" Old Tarkio inquired shrilly.

"A scream? No. I've only been over to the Raytown post office to mail a letter," Loomis said.

That, Baird decided, was a trumped-up lie. Loomis now arose and hurried to the stairs. There was no elevator, the Silver Spray being only a three-story hotel. Social Celebrity Loomis, shorn of all his usual effete dignity, astonished Baird by stumbling twice as he ascended to his room.

Baird joined Carewe at the desk. "The sheriff and a deputy are already on the way to the bend," Carewe reported. "It's only a little way, so—"

The night clerk was interrupted by a call on the house phone. After answering, he turned annoyedly to the porter. "Mr. Haglen, in Thirty-six, wants ice water," he directed.

"Deuced funny about that electric sign, what?" Carewe continued to Baird. "Somebody was foolin' with it last night, too."

"What?" Baird asked sharply. "Last night?"

"At about this same hour," the night clerk said. "But last night a different set

of letters went dark. All but two of them, as I remember. But it proves somebody was throwing switches over at the Fitch house. I wonder why!"

"Who besides you saw the sign blink last night?" Baird asked.

"A half dozen guests saw it," Carewe stated. "That Amazon in pants, Mrs. Polk, for one. We chanced to be on the porch looking north when it happened. All but two letters went off, stayed off for five minutes, then came on again."

"Can you imagine a motive for the murder?" Baird asked.

"A motive? No. Everybody liked Eva Fitch, even if she was a qua—but wait! Gee whiz! I'd clean forgotten. A motive? Why, yes, I can think of a motive. Doctor Fitch, tonight, had five thousand dollars in her handbag. Fifty centuries. That's it. Somebody killed her for that roll o' money."

"How do you know she had it?"

"I saw it. She asked me to put it in the safe for her."

"When?"

"This evening. She and her husband came down for six-thirty supper as usual. After supper, Mr. Fitch sat down in the lobby to read a New York paper. Mrs. Fitch, I noticed, went up alone to the mezzanine parlor. In ten minutes she came down and handed me an envelope full of money. I counted it. There were fifty century bills. She wanted me to keep it overnight in the safe. Naturally I hesitated to assume that big responsibility, she not being an overnight guest and our safe being rather a joke.

"Seeing my reluctance, she put the money back in her handbag and said, 'Oh, never mind'. She rejoined her husband and they went home."

"Was anyone," Baird inquired, "standing by when she exposed the money?"

Carewe reflected studiously before replying. "Yes," he answered finally, "just

as she stowed the money back in her bag, Mr. Loomis came to the desk and asked for his key."

CHAPTER TWO

Fitch

BEFORE Baird could question further, a tall, sallow man with slate-gray eyes and unruly blond hair came down the stairs. His name, Baird knew, was Haglen.

"The porter," Haglen said to Carewe, "just told me that Mrs. Doctor Fitch has been murdered. Is that right?"

"Yes, Mr. Haglen. Did you know the Fitches?"

"No, but they were pointed out to me at supper," Haglen said. "I've been puzzled ever since. Fitch's face struck me, somehow, as familiar. I've been trying to place it. Odd about those lights! Did you see them?"

"Yes," Baird said. "Did you?"

"No, I'd gone to bed. But the porter just told me. I did see the sign blink last night, though."

Just then Patrick Shane entered the lobby with the county sheriff. At a signal from Shane, Baird joined them.

"A deputy is watching the body until the coroner can take it to the Raytown morgue," Shane said swiftly. "Right now Sheriff Dicer, here, is going up to have a chat with Lionel Fitch."

"Yep," Dicer said with a wag of his head, "but chances are he's lit out. Ain't hardly a doubt but what he killed her. I've asked Mr. Shane to come along and have a look. Danged funny about them lights!"

"A guest by the name of Haglen," Baird told them, "has a vague idea he's seen Fitch before, somewhere in the past. Want to talk with him?"

"Not time now," Dicer decreed. "But bring him along. I can talk with him as

we walk to the Fitch's. If Fitch is there, Haglen can take a good look at him. If he can identify him it might help."

Baird beckoned to Haglen, who proved quite willing to go along, and so the four men set forth immediately on the half-mile walk up the river.

The Fitch sign, Baird noted as they moved nearer to it, was burning brightly with not a single letter dark.

"So you got an idear you've seen Fitch before, have you, Mr. Haglen?" Dicer asked. "Where you from?"

"Seattle," Haglen told him. "However, I don't seem to connect Fitch with Seattle. Maybe, after another look at him, I can place him."

THE four men walked on abreast up the river path, a noisy current on one side of them, a dark slope of timber on the other. As they proceeded, not swiftly because Baird and Shane still wore waders, Baird recited everything he had learned in the hotel lobby.

"She had five grand, did she?" echoed Dicer. "Well, there's your crime, all solved. She was afraid her husband, who's a no-account loafer, would take it away from her, so she asked Carewe to keep it overnight in the hotel safe. Carewe wouldn't do that, though. And on the way home Fitch did try to take the money from his wife. That happened just as they got to the bridge. In a struggle, he choked her and heaved her in the river."

"That," Shane agreed, "would fit the money and the fact that Mrs. Polk heard a woman scream on the bridge. But it does not fit the blinking sign. Why should Fitch advertise his own crime?"

"One other thing," Haglen offered as they strode along. "At supper tonight, I sat only one table away from the Fitches. They were quarreling."

"About what?" Shane asked.

"About a monkey."

"That clicks," Dicer chimed in. "Mrs. Fitch owned a pet monkey. Fitch hated it like poison. He was always nagging his wife to get rid of it."

They arrived, now, at the bridge. Though a railless, wooden structure, it was stout enough to support automobile traffic. Reaching it, Dicer produced a flashlight and said: "Let's look for signs of violence."

They searched, quite thoroughly, but not a clue was found.

"The fact remains, however," Shane commented, "that, according to Mrs. Polk, a woman screamed here at nine thirty. That seems to check, because it should take about a half hour for a body to be borne by the current to the bend. And when Eva Fitch's body arrived at the bend, it was ten o'clock."

Having crossed to the west end of the bridge, the four men found themselves at a corner of the Fitch lawn. The Fitch house was a two-story log structure, with a side toward the river, its front facing downstream and in the general direction of the hotel. The electric sign, still illuminated brightly, stood on the porch eave. The lawn itself covered perhaps an acre, and was bare except for a single tall oak in the foreground.

"There's a lamp burning in the front room," Shane remarked as they approached the porch. "And the front door's wide open. Hello! What the devil is that up there on the sign?"

Now Baird, as he moved a step nearer, saw that it was a living monkey. The beast, which was only about twice the size of a large squirrel, was posed directly over the 'F' in DR EVA FITCH.

"What's that little devil got hold of?" Haglen asked.

Baird, too, now saw that the monkey held in its paws a small metal triquet.

"Come," Sheriff Dicer urged, "let's see if Fitch has flown the coop."

THEY mounted the porch steps. Dicer's flashlight was still on and on the top step it exposed a crimson clue. Shane, stooping, touched it.

"It's a spot of blood," Shane announced. "Which indicates that there was dirty work here on the porch steps as well as on the bridge."

"That proves," Dicer said heavily, "that Eva Fitch was knocked over right here. The killer then dragged her to the bridge; she still had one scream left in her when he choked it off there—and heaved her in the river."

Baird, looking about for other bloodstains, saw none.

By then Dicer was at the open door, yelling: "Hey, anybody home?"

There was no answer. The four men entered the front hall. On the right was a door to an office where Eva Fitch had received patients. That door stood open. The office was empty. Dicer's flash, exploring it, revealed no signs of violence.

The door on the left was shut. Shane opened it. It led to a lighted living room, at the far wall of which was a divan. Stretched face up and at full length on that divan lay the master of the house, Lionel Fitch. He had the look of death.

He was a bearded man, a virile six feet in height, weighing almost two hundred pounds and he had most certainly been assaulted. His beard and hair were clotted with blood. His cheeks, normally swarthy, bore the pallor of a ghost.

A breath of life, however, was still in him. A barely audible groan escaped him just as the four men reached the divan. Shane and Dicer kneeled there and gave a quick examination.

"He was clouted on the back of the head," Dicer reported.

"That's not all," Shane added, after

lifting the black beard which reached midway of the victim's chest. "He was strangled with a wire, or rope, as if, being harder to handle, the killer began by giving him a rap on the head."

To Baird it was perfectly evident that the damage to Fitch could not have been self-inflicted. The blow had been struck precisely on the bald spot at the crown of his head. It had cut deep and bled freely. A red circle at the throat indicated that, after being knocked down, the man had been choked. Most certainly he had been left for dead. Baird realized that only a man of enormous vitality could have survived such a vicious assault.

"Fetch a pan o' water," bawled Dicer, and Haglen dashed away on that errand.

A chair, Baird noted, had been turned over. What had been a wide pool of blood was at the center of the room, the blood by now having soaked into the deep nap of a rug.

"That's where he fell," Dicer guessed. "His wife, hearing the racket, came across the hall from her office. Seeing the killer at work, she ran out of the house. She was beating it to the hotel for help when the killer caught her at the bridge. She screamed there. The man choked her, chucked her in the river, then came back here to make sure Fitch was dead."

"That checks," Baird agreed. "He found Fitch down and out, but still alive. So he choked him."

Shane shook his head. "But why should he carry Fitch to the divan? I'll warrant Fitch didn't get up himself. He was just coming to when we came in. Thanks, Haglen."

Haglen had arrived with a pan of water.

"Can you place this fellow, Haglen?" Dicer asked. "Look at him good."

Haglen peered steadily at Fitch's face. Finally he shook his head. "I've seen

him somewhere," he said, "but I can't be sure. Possibly before he had a beard."

DICER was bathing Fitch's face. Fitch moaned. After a minute he opened his eyes and stared stupidly.

"He's big and tough," Dicer said. "He'll live to tell us who socked him, and that's all we want to know. Who did it, Fitch?"

Fitch was still too groggy to talk.

"All your theories, Sheriff," Shane said, "leave out the blinking sign. To accept any of them, we must believe that the murderer knew of a switch by which he could darken five of ten letters in the sign; that he did so, advertising his crime to the hotel down the river; that he remained at the switch for some minutes at risk of capture; that he finally illumined the full sign and went away. All that would mean a crime of wild passion. But a crime of passion wouldn't include the stealing of five thousand dollars."

"Well, maybe that roll of money is still in the house," offered Dicer.

He took charge of the job of bringing Fitch back to full consciousness, while Shane, Baird and Haglen looked about for the money. But they found nothing anywhere in the house.

"Cash loot doesn't fit this patchwork at all," Shane kept insisting. "Only a brutal temper of revenge, overruling all other motives, would have caused the killer to blink that sign."

"Unless the sign is wired for the purpose," Baird objected, "I can't see how he could darken five letters and leave the other five lighted."

"He might partly unscrew bulbs," Haglen suggested vaguely. He illustrated by giving a half turn to a living room light bulb. It went out. With a half turn in the reverse direction, he made it come on again.

"No good," Shane said. "Five letters went dark in a wink, as though a switch had been thrown. There must be at least a dozen globes in each letter of the sign, and no man could unscrew sixty light globes simultaneously. Even then he would need a step ladder and would have to move the ladder four times, because the bottom of the sign is eight feet above the ground and from end to end is about twenty feet long."

Just then Baird heard Dicer at the Fitch telephone. He was summoning an ambulance, so that Fitch could be taken to the Raytown hospital.

"Has he talked?" Shane asked when Dicer rejoined them.

"Not yet. But don't worry; he will."

The sheriff again kneeled by Fitch, urgently coaxing him to speech. All he could bring out was an occasional groan. Shane, in the meantime, was centering his wits on the winking sign.

"See if you can find the fuse box, Art," he suggested.

Baird went to the kitchen where, with small trouble, he found a fuse closet. On the wall of this and just below an electric meter were two rows of fuses. There were four fuses in the top row, ten in the bottom row. Each was an ordinary ten ampere, one hundred and twenty-five volt house fuse. Baird loosened the left fuse in the top row.

"Anything go off?" he yelled.

"The office went dark," Shane called back. "Try another one."

Baird next loosened the first fuse in the bottom row. "What about it?" he shouted.

There was no response, so Baird went toward the front to see for himself. The reason they hadn't answered him, he found, was that all attention was centered on Fitch.

CHAPTER THREE

Monkey Business

FITCH was at last able to talk. "I was hit on the back of the head," he was saying groggily to Dicer.

"Who did it?" the sheriff prompted.

"I didn't see him," the victim murmured.

"Don't you know who he was?"

Fitch shook his head. Dicer questioned him desperately, but in vain. Fitch could not recall being strangled. He could not remember being placed on the divan. He hadn't the faintest idea who assaulted him, he said. All he knew was that he had been standing in the center of this room, with his back to the hall door, when he was clouted on the head. He went down, he said, and could remember nothing more until revived by Dicer.

"Your wife," Dicer told him bluntly, "is dead. Murdered. Her body has been taken from the river."

Baird assumed that the sheriff broke the news thus brusquely in order to goad a statement from Fitch, in case Fitch was shielding someone. But Fitch did not add to his testimony. His reaction seemed to be surprise rather than grief, Baird thought.

"I loosened another fuse," Baird now told the others. "What group of lights went out?"

House lights, they found, had not been affected. So Baird and Shane went to the front lawn for a look at the sign. The 'D', or first letter of ten in the sign, was out. The others were burning brightly.

"That suggests," Baird said, "that the ten fuses in the lower row each control a letter in this sign."

Shane didn't comment, his attention being fixed upon the monkey which was still perched impudently on the sign. The metal trinket still in its clutch.

"What the devil is it?" Shane wondered aloud.

"I can't get a thing more out of Fitch," complained Dicer who at that moment emerged from the house.

"What about this pet monkey?" Shane asked. "Did it ordinarily have the run of the lawn?"

"No," Dicer told him. "Mrs. Fitch always kept it inside, poodle-dog fashion. Generally it was perched on her shoulder during consultations with clients. A mischievous imp, I've heard say. Fitch hated it. It was always making off with his pipe, or fountain pen, or anything it could get its paws on."

"It's got its paws on something right now," Shane said.

He spoke coaxingly to the monkey in an effort to get it down. The animal only chattered derisively. Shane then tossed a pebble, hoping to scare it down from the perch. This was successful, although the monkey did not drop whatever it held. Scampering to the end of the sign, it transferred the metal trinket from paws to teeth, then climbed down a post to the ground. Away it ran across the lawn, with Shane, Dicer and Baird in hot pursuit.

But the little ape was far too agile to be caught. After being chased in circles about the lawn, it finally scampered up the bole of the tall, lone oak which stood about thirty feet in front of the house. Baird noted that the lower limbs of this tree had been hewn off, no doubt so that foliage would not obscure from a distance the electric-lighted sign. Thus the lowest remaining branch was a good twenty feet above the ground, and on this the monkey perched with the trinket still in its paws.

Exasperated, Shane threw pebble after pebble. At last he hit the monkey. With a squeal, it retaliated by hurling its trinket at Shane. Shane caught it. It proved

to be a brass disk with the number "22" on it, attached to an ordinary hotel room key.

BAIRD immediately recognized the type of key. He took out his own—the key of the room he shared with Shane at the Silver Spray Hotel. The two brass tags, except for the numbers thereon, were identical.

Shane whistled. "It looks," he said slowly, "like some guest at the hotel paid a call here tonight. And that while dealing with the Fitches, he dropped his room key. Then the monkey grabbed the key and climbed to the top of the sign."

"What a break!" Dicer agreed grimly. "We got his address—it's Room Twenty-two, Silver Spray Hotel. Mr. Baird, suppose you go in and ring up the night clerk. Ask him at what hour the key to room Twenty-two was last called for, and who is registered in that room."

Baird, entering the house, was inclined to concede that the case was as good as solved. He did not envy whoever chanced to be registered in 22 at the Silver Spray Hotel. Almost certainly that individual had been here tonight and had, after losing the key, made a desperate effort to regain it. At least it was reasonable to presume that the monkey had been chased. Otherwise, being a house pet, it would not have been found outside and perched atop the sign.

Going to the rear of the house, Baird found the telephone in an odd place, the pantry. Only a man fairly familiar with the premises, he reflected, would be likely to find that phone promptly. Baird's own finding of it was expedited only because he had heard Dicer telephone for an ambulance. He now rang up the hotel, where the night clerk, Carewe, answered.

"When," Baird inquired, "was the key of Room Twenty-two last called for?"

"At about seven thirty this evening," he was informed.

"By the resident of the room?"

"Of course."

"And who has Room Twenty-two?"

"Mr. Lester Loomis of New York."

When Baird reported that information to Dicer, the sheriff wanted to descend immediately upon the hotel and arrest Loomis.

"It proves," he argued, "that he was here since seven thirty. He didn't show up again at the hotel until ten thirty. The murder was nine thirty and the lights were winked at ten."

Shane was less certain. "It hardly makes a case," he said thoughtfully. "Looks bad for Loomis, I'll admit. Baird here says he was plainly upset when he entered the hotel at half past ten, and that his statement about not having been up this way seemed unconvincing. Too, he was standing by when Mrs. Fitch exposed her five thousand dollars to Carewe. That was right after supper, probably at seven thirty when Loomis called for his key."

"Yeh, and I'm gonna pinch him before he has a chance to beat it," Dicer insisted.

"You're the boss," Shane smiled. "But why not simply post a watch over him while we scout for more clues?"

To this suggestion, Dicer agreed. By using the telephone he found that the deputy left with the body of Eva Fitch had been relieved by the coroner. The deputy was now at the hotel awaiting further orders. Dicer instructed him to make sure that Lester Loomis did not leave the hotel. Just as the sheriff finished telephoning, a rumble of wheels was heard on the bridge. A moment later an ambulance drew up in front of the Fitch lodge.

Fitch, in a critical condition, was put in the ambulance.

Away it went and again was heard to rumble across the plank bridge.

"And now," Patrick Shane said briskly, "let's see what we can turn up. So far the only deadwood is on Loomis."

"You're giving Fitch a clean bill, are you?" Haglen asked.

"Not entirely," Shane answered him. "While it's true his wounds could not be self-inflicted, it's still possible he murdered his wife. Maybe Fitch himself was then assaulted by someone with a motive to protect or avenge the woman. Hello! There seems to be an odd number, or something, sketched on that smeared rug."

THEY were all in the living room, where Fitch claimed to have been assaulted. On the center of the rug there was what had been a pool of blood; now it was a large red stain about a foot in diameter and well soaked into the rug. What caught the attention of Shane was a number sketched with precise draftsmanship on that bloodstain.

It was the number 7. The figure's top bar was about five inches long, with the vertical bar in proportion. A brush about half an inch wide might have been used to trace it on that moist stain. To Baird, it was a clue no less grotesque than the winked sign. Why should a murderer trace a neat 7 in a pool of his victim's blood?

Shane dropped to his knees beside it. His face was keen and eager, yet baffled. He could make nothing of it. At last he directed Baird to bring him a blank sheet of white letter paper, business size, from the office. Baird did so. With it Shane carefully blotted the stain. Since the nap of the rug stood up on all parts of the stain, except where the weight of a brush or stick had traced the outlines of the 7, the nap across the 7 being mashed down flat, Shane's white paper now recorded an exact duplicate of the 7. That is, the 7 was printed in a fainter tint of pink on the paper.

This print Shane carefully preserved.

"It proves Fitch was knocked down right here," Dicer said uncertainly.

"But does it?" Shane countered. "What about the spot of blood on the front steps? By the evidence of the scream, Mrs. Fitch was caught and murdered on the bridge. So if Fitch was knocked senseless on this rug, why should there be a stain on the front step? And why should the killer, after allowing Fitch to lie here long enough to make a pool of blood on the rug, then put him on the divan?"

To these queries Dicer had no answer.

Shane then asked Baird to show him the fuse closet. Very brief experiments there sufficed to prove that the upper row of fuses controlled lights in the house, while the lower row of ten fuses controlled the DR EVA FITCH sign. Each fuse in its turn controlled a letter.

"Well, anyway we know now how he winked the sign," Dicer said. "He simply loosened the second, fourth, sixth, seventh and ninth fuses in the lower row. That would darken five letters and leave 'death'".

Shane, grinning, shook his head. "You'd better go look for a five-handed murderer, then," he said. "Because five letters went dark in a wink. A man using both hands could loosen two fuses at a time. But not five. What puzzles me is why the sign need have ten fuses."

A tag on the master switch indicated that the Harwood Electrical Shop of Raytown had originally installed the wiring.

"Let's rout Harwood out of bed," Shane suggested, "and find out."

Dicer, who knew Harwood personally, telephoned him. When the connection was made, Shane talked with the electrician. After a brief discussion he reported to the others.

"Harwood did the wiring three years ago, when the house was built. He says Eva Fitch's first idea was to have a raffle sign, one in which the letters go off and on in succession from end to end—they

give the impression of running water. But that, she found, would cost more than she wanted to pay. As a result she merely had each letter separately fused, which would facilitate the riffling scheme later if desired."

"Here's a point," the sallow Haglen offered suddenly. "I did not see the sign blink tonight, but I did see it blink twenty-four hours earlier. The eight interior lights went off in order, about a second apart. The outside letters, 'D' and 'H', did not go off at all. About five minutes later they came on again in reverse order, nine to two."

"That," Shane admitted, "could easily have been done by a person here at the fuse box. A couple of you go out and have a look, while I demonstrate."

Haglen and Dicer went to the front lawn. Baird, remaining with Shane, saw him begin with the second fuse and loosen fuses from left to right until the ninth fuse was loose in its socket. After a wait, he reversed the procedure.

Haglen and Dicer rejoined them. "The lights acted exactly as they did twenty-four hours before the murder," Haglen said.

"It proves somebody was foolin' with the fuse box," Dicer growled. "I guess he rigged up some trick to make five lights go off all at once."

But there was no evidence that wires had been tampered with. When the master switch was pulled, the entire sign went dark. Shane could conceive of no scheme whereby five sign lights could be controlled separately and in a wink.

The search for clues continued. No more were found. At last, quite suddenly, the entire house and the sign went dark.

Dicer's voice, ringing out in the pitch darkness, explained: "It's one A. M., that's all. The power house which feeds juice to this lodge shuts down at one in the morning. It doesn't pay 'em to keep

a man there longer than that. The service begins at sundown and lasts till one A. M."

"Time we're trying our luck at the hotel, anyway," Shane said. "Let's go."

The hotel, Baird knew, got its electricity from the municipal plant at Raytown, which ran all night. Dicer now went about with his flash and locked all doors and windows of the Fitch house. He put the keys in his pocket. The four men then started for the hotel.

Shane and Dicer walked ahead, Dicer lighting a path with his flash. Baird and Haglen brought up the rear. Suddenly Baird heard Shane exclaim: "Look! What's that?"

He and Dicer had just reached the plank bridge. The sheriff's bull's-eye flash, shining ahead, made the floor of the bridge bright from end to end. Thus a package which lay near the center of the bridge was plainly exposed.

ADVANCING, Dicer picked it up. It was a neat package of hundred-dollar bills, fifty in all.

Dicer's jaw sagged a full inch. "Gosh! The guy didn't get it after all, did he? Funny all four of us crossed this bridge goin' to the lodge, without seein' it!"

"We'd have seen it if it had been here," Shane said sharply.

"You mean somebody put it here in the last two hours?" wondered Haglen.

"Yes, either intentionally or dropped it by mistake," Shane insisted. "On a bet it's the same money Eva Fitch wanted Carewe to store overnight in the hotel safe. Any ideas, Dicer?"

"Only thing that's crossed this bridge in the last two hours," the sheriff reminded him, "was the Raytown ambulance. The driver and attendant of that ambulance can hardly be mixed up in the crime. But Fitch is in it up to his

neck. And because we found Fitch half murdered, we didn't bother to search him. There's where we overlooked a bet."

"I get you," Shane answered thoughtfully. "You think the money was in Fitch's pocket. While we were all bending over him, he had no chance to get rid of it. But they were bound to find it when they undressed him at the hospital. So as the ambulance crossed the bridge, Fitch simply tossed the package out of the back end. Is that your slant, Dicer?"

"Sure. Isn't it yours, too?"

"The idea has points," Shane conceded. "By tossing it out on the bridge Fitch could be reasonably sure that we four men, returning to the hotel, would find it. Being honest, we'll turn it over to the estate of Eva Fitch. Presumably Fitch is heir to that estate, so he'll get the money anyway. Whereas if found in his pocket it would lead to a suspicion that he had murdered his wife."

Dicer pocketed the money. The four men then continued on across the bridge and turned south on the riverside trail. In a little less than half a mile they reached the hotel. Night Clerk Carewe was the only person in the lobby. The clock over the registry desk indicated 1:25 A. M.

Haglen yawned sleepily. "I'll be turning in," he said. "Sorry I couldn't help you any. But I still feel that somewhere in the dim past I've run across Fitch."

"Sleep on it," Shane smiled. "Maybe you'll remember by morning."

Haglen went up to his room. On the stairs he passed an alert young redhead who came down and reported to Dicer. He proved to be the deputy who had been detailed to watch Loomis.

"He's in bed asleep," the deputy told Dicer. "Want him on the carpet?"

"Right away," the sheriff answered. "And bring his walking stick along too."

CHAPTER FOUR

The Man In 22

BAIRD and Shane went up in order to get rid of heavy fishing coats and waders. In ten minutes they were back in the lobby, where they found Dicer confronting Lester Loomis. Loomis wore a lounging robe over his pajamas, and slippers. There was a wild look of fright in his eyes. He was haggard.

"Just where have you been," Dicer was demanding, "since you called for your key at seven thirty?"

At that moment the deputy came down with Loomis's cane. It was a polished walnut stick with a silver ball for a grip. Dicer took it, peered closely at the grip, then handed it to Shane. Shane used a magnifying glass to examine the ball grip. Baird understood that he was looking for a faint trace of blood which Loomis might have failed to remove. Certainly this cane might well have been the club which had whacked Fitch's skull.

"Why," Loomis countered huskily, "do you want to know?"

"To get a line on who murdered Eva Fitch."

Loomis sat down very rigidly on the extreme edge of a chair. His eyes were fixed on Dicer's hands which were toying with a room key—the key of Room 22. Seeing it, Loomis would hardly dare to claim he hadn't been at the Fitch lodge since seven thirty.

It was a long minute before Loomis answered. When he did, it was quite evident that he chose his words with caution. "At seven thirty," he said, "I called for my key at the desk. Going upstairs, I got my hat and stick. Then—"

"Hold on," Dicer cut in sharply. "As you called for your key, Doctor Fitch was at the desk, wasn't she? You saw her leave with a roll of money, didn't you?"

"I saw her at the desk with money," Loomis admitted. "But I thought she was only paying for her supper."

"With a roll of centuries?" Dicer derided. "But never mind; go ahead with your alibi, Loomis."

The New York clubman, who had been pale, now flushed red. "See here, you can't talk to me that way. Be civil, or I shan't answer you at all."

"Oh, yes you will," the sheriff snapped. "If you don't, I'm pinching you here and now, Loomis."

Loomis winced. At last, again choosing his words carefully, he went on. "I was in my room until eight. Then I went up to the Fitch place, where I had an appointment at eight fifteen. Doctor Fitch received me in her office and gave me a professional consultation. My trouble is chronic indigestion. Doctor Fitch prescribed a diet and gave me a box of pills. I left at eight forty. Having a letter to mail, I walked over the hill to the Raytown post office. From there I returned leisurely to the hotel."

"And in the meantime Eva Fitch was murdered," Dicer said dryly. "Are you sure you left her house at eight forty?"

"Quite sure."

"Did Fitch see you leave?"

"He didn't see me at all. My call being entirely a business one, he naturally didn't join us. I suppose he was in another part of the house, but have no way of knowing. The only company the doctor had while I consulted her was her pet monkey, which was perched on her shoulder."

"How did you get into your room," Shane intervened, "when you returned to the hotel?"

"I hadn't locked my room, fortunately. The key I must have lost either at the Fitch place or as I strolled over the hill to the post office. I see you have it, Sheriff. Where did you find it?"

"I'm asking the questions," Dicer re-

torted. "Answer this one: Did you see anyone after you left the Fitch house?"

"I think not," Loomis admitted.

"On your way to the post office," Dicer pursued more sternly, "didn't you miss your key? Didn't you return to the Fitch's for it, finding the office empty, but with five thousand dollars on the desk? Weren't you making off with it when Fitch caught you? Batted him down with your cane, didn't you?"

"I did not," Loomis denied, staring.

"And didn't Eva Fitch come in about then, see you and race toward the hotel for help? What happened was that you caught her at the bridge, choked her and chucked her in the river. Then you went back to make sure Fitch was dead. He wasn't. He'd got up, staggered to the divan and laid down. Didn't you choke him, too, and leave him for dead?"

"You're crazy!" cried Loomis. "I did none of those things."

"And getting cold feet later," Dicer went on relentlessly, "didn't you slip out of the hotel by the back door, take the money to the bridge, drop it there, then sneak back to your room? That would be a little while before a deputy took post at your door."

This time Loomis fairly shrieked his denial.

To Baird's surprise, Shane again suggested a liberal policy toward Loomis. After calling Dicer to one side, Shane said: "Your arraignment explains neither the blinked sign nor the bloody seven. Which means that the crime goes deeper. Right now I'm going to file a telegram which might open a lead. In the meantime, why not merely keep Loomis under surveillance? Make it plain that if he leaves the hotel, he'll be pinched."

Dicer grudgingly assented. Turning to Loomis he growled: "Go to your room. You'll be watched. Not a chance in the world for you to get away."

"I've nothing to run away from," Loomis said, and ascended to his room.

Baird was standing by when Shane filed his telegram. It was to the Maxwell Information Bureau, Inc. Shane's wire asked for a check-up on Lester Loomis of New York and the Abner Polks of Baltimore; it also asked that the backgrounds of Eva and Lionel Fitch be traced as far as possible.

"Why should you worry about the Polks?" Baird asked his friend.

"They were out in the woods when it happened, weren't they?" Shane answered as they rejoined Dicer.

Dicer was instructing his deputy to go up and sit on the steps of the Fitch lodge until relieved. "Don't let anyone enter the house, Bill," he said. "When those two servants show up in the morning, get statements from them. Then have them report to my Raytown office."

When the deputy was gone, Dicer beckoned to Carewe. "Just who passed through the lobby between eight and ten?" he wanted to know.

"I hardly noticed," the sleek night clerk answered. "That old club-foot, Tarkio, was in and out; but he's harmless. Most of the guests, including Haglen, went to bed about nine. About that time the Polks went out for a walk; I remember that Polk was beefing about it; he didn't want to go, but his wife made him. Loomis went out at eight and didn't show up until Mr. Baird was in here telling about the murder. Altogether, it was a quiet evening."

"You're sure the Polks went out at about nine?"

"Yeh, because it was only about ten minutes after they'd gone out that a queer accident in the upstairs corridor caused me to note the time, in order to make a report of it. It was nine ten.

"What sort of queer accident," Shane inquired quickly, "occurred at nine ten?"

"I heard a crash just overhead," the clerk said. "Naturally I ran upstairs to investigate. A tall china vase which sits on a stand at the front of the hall had fallen to the floor. It was shattered. The thing puzzled me, for no one would admit having knocked it over."

"The corridor was empty?"

"When I got there it was. But in a moment half the guests on the second floor began popping their heads out to inquire about the crash."

Dicer yawned. The crash of the vase did not seem to interest him. But Shane pounced on it eagerly.

"The time intrigues me," he said. "Nine ten. That's about halfway between eight forty, when Loomis says he left the Fitch house, and nine thirty, when Mrs. Polk says she heard a scream from the bridge. The Polk testimony about that scream is all we have to indicate that the assault took place at nine thirty or at the bridge. Later money was found on the bridge, but we know it was planted. We know that the body washed ashore at the bend below here, but as to how far it floated there is no proof. We don't even know that Eva Fitch wasn't in this hotel at nine ten; in fact her body might have floated only from the hotel to the bend. It could have been snagged by a rock and held stationary for any length of time. Were you alone in the lobby when the vase crashed?"

"I was," Carewe answered.

"Then the lobby became entirely deserted when you dashed up to investigate the crash," Shane said. "It's barely possible that someone knocked over the vase to gain that end—so that you could not see him or her do something in the lobby. What did you do with the fragments?"

Carewe brought a waste basket in which were fragments of a china vase. The curved handle, Baird saw, was still in one

piece. And Shane, on that handle, found a very distinct thumb print.

"It may lead to nothing," Shane said to the yawning Dicer, "but I'm curious to know who last handled this vase. Have you a fingerprint man at Raytown?"

Dicer nodded sleepily. It was now after two A. M.

"Please humor me, then," Shane said. "Have this thumbprint photographed and compared with prints of everyone who is known to have been in this lobby since supper. Your man, with Carewe's help, can get samples of prints on the quiet—for instance from water glasses taken from the several hotel rooms. If a print checks, authentic prints can then be taken."

Dicer promised. The curved vase handle was carefully wrapped for the purpose. "Any more ideas?" he yawned.

"Yes, you might find out when Eva Fitch drew five thousand dollars from her bank. And in the morning you might have an electrician go over the wiring at the Fitch house. Right now I'm going to bed. Come, Art."

Baird went with Shane up to their room. Both were dog tired. Undressing, Baird noted a stout hook by the window, from which hung a coil of rope. All rooms at the Silver Spray, he knew, were so equipped. It was the sort of makeshift fire escape frequently provided by country hotels.

"Makes it easy for a murderer to come and go, without passing through the lobby," he suggested to Patrick Shane.

"Bright boy," Shane grinned. "Stick around and you'll make a real detective yet. Here's another thought to sleep on. It was a rope of about that size which caused the lacerations on the throat of Lionel Fitch."

CHAPTER FIVE

One Who Was Hanged

WHEN Baird awoke it was eleven in the morning. Going down to the restaurant, he found that Shane had already breakfasted. It was nearly noon when he found his friend, who was seated on the porch talking to the Polks and Old Man Tarkio.

Mrs. Polk wore overalls and waders; she had been whipping the river for bass all morning.

Her husband, short, fat and puffy-eyed, now went in with old Tarkio for a game of checkers.

"I've just verified Haglen's description of the way the sign blinked night before last," Shane said by way of greeting to Baird. "Mrs. Polk and Tarkio both saw it the same way. All but the two outside letters went dark, the others fading in order instead of all at once."

"That's right," boomed Mrs. Polk. "Abner! Where's Abner?" She went in to break up the checker game.

"An electrician has checked up on the wiring at the Fitch place," Shane went on. "He found no way in which five letters could have been switched off while the other five remained lighted. That puts me up a stump."

"Any dope on the bloody seven?"

"Not a thing. Nor the crashed vase, either."

"Any report from the information agency?"

"Only as regards Loomis, who was easy to look up. Loomis is stony broke and desperately in debt. Eva Fitch, by the way, drew that money out of her bank yesterday afternoon. It's in bright, new, consecutively numbered centuries, which may be why a thief was afraid to keep it."

"That's logical," Baird agreed.

"Right now, suppose we go have a look at the mezzanine parlor of this hotel."

Baird followed Shane through the lobby and up steps to a small, interfloor parlor. There Shane searched for any chance clue. His only reason for doing so was that Mrs. Fitch, according to Carewe, had paid a brief visit to that parlor just before exposing her money at the desk.

Shane examined cigarette and cigar butts in a tray, glanced at the date of a Scranton daily which had been read and cast aside, after which he was rewarded by finding a crumpled sheet of paper in a waste basket. When he smoothed it out, it proved to be a menu for last night's supper at this same hotel. On the back of it a single unsigned sentence had been written, in pencil, in the hand of a woman.

Descending to the lobby desk, Shane asked the day clerk if he could produce a sample of Eva's Fitch's handwriting. The clerk could, Mrs. Fitch on a number of occasions having signed the register. A comparison quickly proved that it was she who had written the sentence on the back of the menu.

Please meet me in the mezzanine parlor directly after supper.

"I wonder who she met there," Shane mused. "It checks with what Carewe told us—that when she came out of the dining room she left her husband reading a paper while she went to the parlor. Returning soon to Carewe, she asked him to store five thousand dollars overnight."

"It spells blackmail, doesn't it?" Baird guessed vaguely. "Somebody here at the hotel, maybe, was trying to blackmail her. In the afternoon she drew money from her bank; then as she ate supper here later she wrote a note on her menu. Maybe her husband didn't know anything about it. On her way out of the dining room or while crossing the lobby, she passed the note to the blackmailer. When

he or she met Mrs. Fitch in the parlor, the five thousand was offered and refused. Maybe because it wasn't enough."

SHANE would not commit himself to this theory. He spent the next hour trying to learn the identity of the person Mrs. Fitch had met in the parlor, but to no avail.

Haglen, rigged out in golf togs, joined them.

"Have you placed Fitch yet?" Shane asked him.

"No, I haven't," the man said. "Right now I'm off to do nine holes at the Raytown municipal course. After that I may drop by the hospital and have another look at Fitch. Want to come along, Baird?"

Baird declined and the tall, sallow guest from Seattle went off alone.

At that moment Sheriff Dicer came puffing into the hotel. "I've been working on Fitch," he reported. "He stands pat—insists he doesn't know who socked him. Looks like there's nothing to do but pinch Loomis."

"You're the boss," Shane said. "But you're a mile short of enough evidence to convict Loomis. You haven't even scratched that bloody seven on the rug, or the winked sign. What I'd like to do is go up and take a nice, long, lonely prowl around the Fitch house. All by myself. Maybe I can turn up something."

"Help yourself," Dicer agreed, handing over a key to the Fitch lodge. "But you're wasting your time. My deputies have combed every inch of the house and grounds. The two servants, by the way, have a cast-iron alibi. From sundown to midnight they were entertaining neighbors at their cottage over the hill. First they heard about the crimes was when they reported for work this morning."

Patrick Shane, nevertheless, put on his

hat and went doggedly upriver toward the Fitch house. Baird, taking the hint, remained behind with Dicer. The two went out on the porch where the club-footed oldster, Tarkio, joined them. Carewe, just up and not due for duty until seven o'clock, appeared and took a seat on the porch rail.

Baird listened to a rehashing of clues until he was weary of them. An audience grew around Dicer who, prompted by queries from old Tarkio, waxed garrulous. Ponderously he developed his Loomis theory, then his Fitch theory, wavering between them.

"The best bet," he wound up, "is to combine 'em. Fitch tried to take five thousand dollars from his wife, who resisted; so he choked her. Just then Loomis showed up for his consultation, witnessed the murder and knocked Fitch down with his cane. In plain sight lay a roll of bills. Loomis took it. Later he got cold feet. To back out of a tight corner, he went up about midnight and put the money on the bridge where he knew I'd find it."

IT WAS past midafternoon when Dicer arrived that far with his theories. His last statement produced a hush of embarrassment. Baird, looking up, noted that Loomis himself had just emerged from the hotel and joined the group. The New Yorker, as a rule meticulously groomed, today was disheveled. He had not shaved. There was a wild redness in his eyes; he was haggard and pale, almost a complete nervous wreck.

Dicer eyed him stonily. Before he could speak, the mannish matron, Mrs. Abner Polk, greeted Loomis.

"Good morning, Mr. Loomis. I'm sorry I didn't have that iodine. But I'm going over to the Raytown drugstore, and if you wish I can—"

"What's that? Wanted some iodine,

did he?" Dicer cut it shrewdly. "What for?"

Loomis with a desperately quick gesture thrust his right hand into his coat pocket. Dicer, on edge himself and misinterpreting the movement, drew a gun. He covered Loomis.

"Easy there, mister!" he cautioned. "Hand out, empty."

Loomis took the hand from his pocket. Dicer gave the pocket a pat; he seemed surprised to discover it did not contain a pistol. What he did see, however, was a circular red stain between the thumb and forefinger of Loomis's right hand.

"What's that?" Dicer barked.

Baird, from where he stood, thought it was a stain of blood. But it proved to be mercurochrome, a disinfectant with which Loomis had treated a slight wound.

"I pinched my hand in a door crack," Loomis said, his eyes failing to meet the sheriff's.

"When did he brace you for some iodine?" Dicer demanded of Mrs. Polk.

"He knocked on our door and asked for it about eleven o'clock last night," she said. "We didn't happen to have any."

"So he used mercurochrome instead, eh?" deduced Dicer. "He'd been in a scuffle and his hand was scratched. Stand still, Loomis, while I have a look at that wound."

The man stood wretchedly while Dicer examined the red spot on his hand.

"Have a look yourself, Baird," Dicer invited, "and see if you agree with us. I'd say a woman bit his hand."

Baird looked. In the loose web of flesh between thumb and forefinger, he saw a very distinct impression of teeth.

Without more ado Dicer whipped out a pair of handcuffs and snapped them on Loomis's wrist.

"That cinches it," he charged. "When you choked her, naturally she struggled.

By ducking her chin, she managed to bite the hand at her throat."

Loomis, handcuffed, backed against the wall and cried out in wild hysteria: "She didn't. It was the monkey. He did it when I tried to take my key from him."

"Oho!" Dicer exulted. "So you lied about not returning a second time to the Fitch's! At your first call, when you consulted the doctor in her office, the monkey was perched on her shoulder. If it had bitten you then, the doctor herself would have treated the bite. Your treating it yourself after you got home proves you'd made a second call at the Fitch's."

That, Baird thought was the clearest logic Dicer had thus far produced. He saw Loomis wince under it.

"Yes, I was there later," the man admitted miserably. "I ought to have told about it, but I was afraid to."

"Why were you afraid?" Dicer rasped.

"I was afraid I wouldn't be believed if I told the truth," Loomis said.

"If you concealed any truth, spill it now," prompted Dicer.

"When I entered the hotel last night at half past ten," the man confessed finally, "I was coming for help. I mean I wanted to send help to Fitch. I knew nothing about an assault on Mrs. Fitch. But the first thing I heard on entering the hotel was that she had been murdered. At that same moment her five thousand dollars was in my own pocket. It flashed to me that if I admitted having just come from the Fitch's, I would be searched. When the money was found in my pocket I would be blamed for the murder. So in a moment of panic, I said I hadn't been there at all. After telling that, I had to stick to it.

"About midnight I slipped out the back way and took the money to the bridge, where I had found it," Loomis went on doggedly. "First aid, I knew, had gone promptly to Fitch. So his revival was

assured without any report from me. I wanted to be left completely out of it."

"Instead, you got in it up to your neck," Dicer said acidly. "Just why did you kill Eva Fitch?"

"I didn't." The denial was shrill; yet to Baird it was not unconvincing. "I left her at eight forty and went to the Raytown post office, as I said. On the way back I missed my room key. Most likely I'd left it at the doctor's office, so I started back there for it at about nine thirty. Crossing the bridge, I saw a sheaf of money. It lay near the center of the bridge. I knew whose it was, because I had seen Doctor Fitch offer it to the hotel clerk two hours earlier. I thought she had dropped it on the way home from supper."

"And so what did you do?" challenged Dicer.

"I did what any honest man would have done. I picked it up with the intention of returning it to the owner.

"With the money in my inside breast pocket," Loomis said, "I continued on across the bridge to the Fitch lawn. What I saw there horrified me. It shocked me dizzy, driving all thought of the five thousand dollars from my mind."

"Got a brainstorm, did you? Forgot you had five grand in your pocket, huh?" baited Dicer. "Never thought of it again until you entered this hotel and heard them talking about the murder!"

"The money," Loomis insisted, "was shocked completely from my mind. For what I saw on the Fitch lawn was the hanging body of Lionel Fitch. There was a rope around his neck. He was hanging from the limb of an oak tree on the lawn."

CHAPTER SIX

Lights Out

DICER blinked, incredulously. The audacity of this testimony seemed

to rob him of retort. Others of the audience were equally dumfounded. Suddenly Baird heard the clear voice of Shane who, unnoticed, had joined the group.

"Yes, it checks," he said to Dicer, "because it explains the winking of that electric-lighted sign. I've just come from there. Prowling about, I saw that someone has done some weird pruning on the foliage of that oak tree."

Dicer gaped at him. "Pruning? Oak tree?" he asked stupidly.

"The tree," Shane said crisply, "is about thirty feet in front of the house. Lower boughs were long ago trimmed away so that they would not obscure the sign from a distance downriver. The lowest remaining bough is long and horizontal, but plenty high enough not to obscure the sign. What happened, I think, was this—

"Night before last, someone, presumably a heavy man, climbed the tree. He could climb easily because the stubs and knots of the sheered limbs offer footholds. I imagine that his object was to spy into a second-story window. To get opposite the window he crawled well out on the high, long and horizontal bough. As he crawled out, the bough sagged under his weight. I have just tested it with my own weight, which caused that bough to sag at least four feet.

"As the man crawled out on the limb night before last, the extreme end of its drooping foliage sagged first, blotting out the 'T' in the sign. The man continued to crawl out, and the further he crawled the lower the bough sagged. Letter by letter the sign was blotted out. The two end letters were never blotted out, however, because the depressed foliage only reaches across the eight interior letters.

"Having spied or failed to spy what he was after, the man descended from the tree. That caused the elastic oak bough

to spring back up to its normal position, the obscured letters of the sign reappearing in reverse order. The man did not realize that he had caused the sign to blink downriver. The first he knew about that was when he returned to the hotel and heard guests discussing it. It gave him an idea. What he next did was inspired by two easily understood motives which I will explain later. It was to return at midnight to the Fitch lawn, after everyone both there and here had gone to bed. By sighting carefully, the man marked exactly which spots of foliage would, if depressed a few feet, allow three of the interior letters to shine through. Then he climbed the tree and pruned away those three spots of foliage. Having done so, he knew that if a heavy man's weight hung from the bough at night, the sign from a distance downriver would spell D E A T H."

Dicer's eyes were like saucers. "But why," he gasped, "would he do it?"

"I'll offer you two motives later," Shane insisted. "Just now, suppose we hear the rest of Loomis's story. After finding Fitch hanging by his neck, Loomis, what did you do?"

"I rescued him," Loomis said promptly. Shane's intervention had gone a long way to restore his self-confidence. "I saw that the rope passed over the bough, its free end being brought down and tied around the hole near the base of the tree. I untied it, easing Fitch's body to the ground. He seemed, at first, to be dead. The back of his head showed an ugly wound. I unlooped the rope from his neck and dropped it right there under the tree. By then I'd found that Fitch was not quite dead."

"The murderer," Shane intervened, "must have returned later that night and removed his rope. Did anyone, by the way, happen to measure the length of the death wink? I didn't. It seemed a long

time before the five obscured letters reappeared. The chances are, however, that it was only about three minutes. We know now that it was exactly as long as Fitch hung by his neck."

"You mean he could hang three minutes and live?" Baird asked blankly.

SHANE said: "At official hangings it frequently takes longer than five or ten minutes to bring death. And there the victim drops from a scaffold which usually breaks the neck. In this case Fitch, already unconscious, was merely pulled clear of the ground a little way, and left. The man who did it had barely departed when Loomis appeared. Yes, Fitch hung three minutes and lived. He's a man of exceptionally robust vitality. Not only that, but he never knew that he was hanged. Go on, Loomis."

"I carried him in to the living room, put him on the divan and tried to revive him," Loomis said. "Failing, I tried to telephone for help. I couldn't find a telephone, wasn't sure there was one. Looking for it, I came upon a monkey with my room key in its paws. Snatching at the key, I was bit. I then ran fast to the hotel both to send first aid to Fitch and to treat my own hand against the danger of infection. Entering the lobby I heard Mrs. Polk say that Eva Fitch had just been found, murdered. Mention of her reminded me of the five thousand dollars, still in my inside breast pocket. Because of the murder, quick help would go to Fitch anyway. The surest way to keep out of jail, I decided, was to deny having just come from the Fitch's. That, I swear, is the truth."

And Baird found himself believing it. Shane also seemed to accept Loomis's statement. Almost every guest at the hotel had now assembled on the porch, and for the next moment there was an excited buzz of whispering among them.

"The only thing I can't understand

about it," Shane was saying to Dicer, "is what seemed to be a figure seven lettered on the bloody rug. It doesn't fit—"

He was interrupted by the day clerk who, emerging from the lobby handed Shane a letter and a telegram. Shane opened the letter first. As he glanced at it his eyebrows raised in surprise.

"It's a report from your fingerprint man, Sheriff," he said. "It gives us a line on who last handled the vase which crashed in the upstairs hall."

"What's a vase at the hotel got to do with a hanging at the Fitch's" Dicer asked impatiently.

Shane, not replying, opened his telegram. Baird, watching, saw his eyes sharpen. More, he saw an expression of almost complete understanding overspread his friend's face.

"Now," he said slowly. "I know why the vase crashed. I also know the motive of murder. The bloody seven, though, still has me guessing. I wonder—"

His eyes, Baird saw, had been moving from face to face among the score of people grouped on the porch. All were standing. Finally Shane's gaze became fixedly arrested. He was staring, Baird thought, at a shorter man who was standing just back of the tall and sallow Haglen. At any rate Shane was staring over Haglen's shoulder.

And now a complete understanding came to the face of Patrick Shane. Advancing, he reached over Haglen's shoulder. From a golf bag slung on that shoulder, he plucked a midiron golf club.

At the same time Shane's left hand produced from his own coat pocket a sheet of white paper. He unfolded the paper. On it was printed in pale pink the exact shape of what had seemed to be a "7" on the Fitch rug.

Baird now saw him fit the steel end of the midiron to the print. The shapes matched exactly.

Haglen, flushing, stepped back and dropped his golf bag with a bang to the porch floor.

"It was with this midiron, Haglen," Shane charged, "that you whacked Fitch over the head. Then you chased his wife, caught her at the bridge and choked her. After going back to finish Fitch, you picked up the golf club. Its seven-shaped steel end was lying on a spreading bloodstain, but you failed to notice it left a print. An hour later, after returning with the sheriff to the crime, you were sent for a pan of water. That was your chance to pick up the rope under the tree and hide it in the shrubbery. I found it this afternoon. It's still there."

"Nonsense!" Haglen challenged hoarsely. "I went to bed at nine o'clock and didn't leave my room until ten thirty."

"And you even crashed a vase to prove it," Shane retorted. "Very thoughtful! You even invented an excuse to string along up there later, with Dicer, Baird and myself, in order to clean up clues. Your excuse, that Fitch's face seemed vaguely familiar, made your interest in the crime plausible. As for Mrs. Fitch, her real name was Eva Haglen. She was your wife."

Shane displayed a telegram received from Maxwell Information, Incorporated. Haglen, taking Dicer and his red-headed deputy completely by surprise, bolted. He was over the porch rail before anyone could stop him. Dodging around a corner of the hotel, he raced into steep, up-sloping woods. Sheriff Dicer, coming out of his trance, raced away after him. So did the red-headed deputy. So did Patrick Shane.

AN HOUR later supper was announced. Neither the fugitive nor his pursuers had been heard from. Loomis still wore the handcuffs. The key was in the sheriff's pocket. He forlornly be-

seceded everyone he encountered to help him out of the handcuffs. But no one would take the responsibility of sawing away the shackle.

By the time dusk fell over the woods, reporters were already swarming from nearby cities. News wires were hot with inquiries from New York. Just as the gloom of night thickened, two Scranton reporters cornered Baird and the Polks on the hotel porch.

By them rushed the river whose white, cascading current, only last night, had borne the lifeless body of Eva Fitch past this same hotel. And now Baird was reminded of his first contact with that horror by the sudden illumination of the electric sign a half mile upriver. All ten letters came on brilliantly.

"I wonder who turned it on!" muttered Abner Polk.

"Probably no one," Baird guessed. "The house, I understand, is locked and deserted. But the sign was on at one A. M. last night when the current was shut off at the power plant. The switch was left just as it was. So when the power-plant service is resumed at dusk this evening, the sign naturally comes on."

Complete darkness followed quickly. With it came a bedraggled Shane.

"Dicer and his dogs," he reported, "are still chasing Haglen. They've got a pack of bloodhounds on the job. But the dogs are baffled because the trail disappears in the river. They're trying to pick it up on the other bank."

Shane, weary, wanted supper. But there was no chance. He was mobbed by reporters.

"Give us the straight of it, Mr. Shane," they insisted.

SHANE, finally, capitulated. "Ten years ago," he explained. Haglen had a modest fortune. His pretty young wife ran away with it, in the company of an

adventurer named Fitch. The husband, in a spirit of bitter revenge, has been looking for them ever since.

"At last he found them. Fitch, I take it, had never known Haglen; or if so, not well enough to recognize him after ten years. After locating them, Haglen took residence at this hotel. I think he approached his wife when she was alone. We don't know what passed between them. My guess is that he offered to take her back if she'd get rid of Fitch. She refused. Drawing five thousand dollars from her bank she offered it to Haglen as a sop; he spurned it; the effort to buy him off only served to inflame his bitterness.

"He resolved to kill them both. Night before last he stalked their house and unintentionally darkened part of the sign. When he heard about the illusion he had created unknowingly here at the hotel, he realized what he could accomplish by a little careful pruning of the tree.

"So he pruned three clumps of foliage from the tree. Why? First, merely to sate his own lust for revenge. Death was his answer to the Fitches. She had forsaken the name of Haglen for the name of Fitch. Very well, he thought, let her name be 'Death'.

"His other reason for the pruning was to establish a canny alibi. The sign would wink at ten o'clock and was sure to be seen by someone down the river. Investigators would then go up there and find Fitch hanging from the tree. Or even if they did not find him until the next morning, the exact hour of his hanging would be fixed because of the winking sign. For that hour Haglen schemed an alibi.

"He went to bed at nine o'clock. At nine ten, he went in his pajamas to the front of the hall, took a vase, carried it to his own door, then hurled it fifty feet along the hall, at the table on which it

usually stood. A dozen guests looked out of their rooms to see why. One of them apparently was Haglen, who stood fifty feet away from the crash. Being in his night clothes, it was presumed he had gone to bed.

"Quickly, then, he slipped out of his window and raced to the Fitch lodge. You know what happened there. I think that when he caught the woman on the bridge she again offered him the five thousand dollars, this time as the price of her own life. In high disdain he slapped it from her hand.

"He throttled her, threw her in the river and went back to the unconscious Fitch. After hanging Fitch, he withdrew just in time to miss Loomis. But as he ran back toward the hotel he looked over his shoulder and saw the full sign reappear. Therefore someone must have cut Fitch down. Regaining his room by use of his fire-escape rope, he kicked off shoes, removed pants and coat; that left him standing in pajamas. He rang for ice water and was so seen by the porter at about ten nineteen.

"But Haglen worried," Shane went on,

"about what agency had released Fitch. To find out, he came down and offered an excuse which seemed to make his interest in the investigation reasonable. Going back up there with us, he threw the rope in the shrubbery. He—"

"Look!" The exclamation came in a tone of awe from one of the reporters. He was pointing up the river.

Shane whirled. What he saw made him a dynamo of action.

"Hurry!" he yelled. "I might have known that he'd do that." He took the porch rail at a bound and raced full speed up the river path.

Baird and the two reporters were at his heels. For a half mile the four ran a dead heat to the bridge. Speeding across it, they arrived at the foot of the Fitch lawn.

Others were close behind. But all were too late. From the bough of that oak tree dangled the self-hung body of Haglen. Beyond its sagging foliage five letters were screened. But the five which remained in somber brilliance, spelled
D E A T H.

IN THE DECEMBER 15th ISSUE

BLOOD ON THE BLOCK

by

FREDERICK C. DAVIS

Like leaves from a tree in Fall they fluttered off—the heads of those murdered men. And no one knew the ghastly weapon the killer used or how he managed to conceal his crimes.

THRILLS

HORROR

MYSTERY

DANGER

in this great novelette in

The DECEMBER 15th
DIME DETECTIVE

Out
DECEMBER 1st



"Hey, you! Halt!" a voice shouted.

Red Dollars

By
T. T. Flynn

Author of "The Jade Joss," etc.

Stained with blood they were, those crimson-spattered bank notes. And to Jerry Prince—Prince of Thieves—they price-marked a murder trail. Danger dollars that could buy death, and death alone, in the horror marts of crimeland.

CHAPTER ONE

Red Beard

JERRY PRINCE wore a red rose in the lapel of his coat as he walked through the revolving doorway of the Hotel Royale. It was after nine in the evening. The brightly lighted lobby was still well filled. Jerry looked about sharply, taking in everything to the smallest detail. He noticed particularly the inconspicuously dressed, bulky-shouldered man loitering by the cigar counter.

That was Sam Winston, the house detective. Jerry knew all about Sam Winston—but Winston did not know him.

Out of the corner of his eye Jerry saw Winston glance indolently in his direction. But Jerry Prince's unhurried stroll toward the elevator bank did not deviate in the slightest. His face did not change its slightly bored expression. He knew what Sam Winston saw—a tall, athletic,

carefully dressed young man who might have belonged to one of the best families of the city—not Jerry Prince, Prince of thieves.

JERRY saluted himself genially in a mirror, entered an elevator, and in company with several other passengers, he was shot skyward.

"Nine," Jerry murmured to the elevator boy.

At the ninth floor he was the only one to get out. He turned to the right along the deeply carpeted corridor. There was no hesitation in his progress after he picked up the trend of the room numbers. 911—913—915 . . . Whistling softly between his teeth Jerry turned to the left at the cross corridor. There it was—939!

Jerry cast one swift look about. The corridor was deserted except for himself. The red globe above the fire-escape door at the end of the corridor glowed ahead of him. His knock on the door of Room 939 was almost gentle. There was no answer. Jerry rapped again.

This time he heard a slight stir inside. Soft steps came to the door, and halted. A voice inside demanded gruffly: "Who is it? What do you want?"

"Bellboy, sir," Jerry said politely.

"What is it? I didn't ring."

"Telegram, sir, marked 'Urgent.' The clerk thought it had better be brought up at once."

"Slip it under the door."

Jerry Prince smiled to himself in the dimly lit corridor. "Sorry, sir," he refused. "You'll have to sign for it."

The muttered comment inside the door was not pleasant. But after a moment the lock clicked. The door opened inward, revealing a bushy, red-bearded face, a pair of shoulders clad in blue silk pajamas. The man gave Jerry one startled look and then exclaimed accusingly

through his beard: "You're not the bell-boy." The door started to close hurriedly.

Jerry stopped it with his foot. His manner changed abruptly to curtness. "Open up!" he ordered. "I'm coming in."

But the blue-clad shoulder remained against the door. An explosive frightened note entered the man's voice. "What do you mean? I'll call the management and have you arrested! Get out! I'll ring for help!"

Jerry Prince's smile was hard, brittle, unworried. "You won't do it, Stanley," he said briefly. "Open up if you know what's good for you."

STANLEY was not the name written on the hotel register by the occupant of this room. Yet the name worked as if magic had been uttered. A startled gasp came through the bushy red beard; a gasp that had every element of fear and apprehension in it. "What do you mean, sir?"

"I mean Stanley," said Jerry Prince firmly. "P. O. Stanley. Do you open up or do I have to take steps?"

Slowly, unwillingly, the other stepped back. Jerry pushed the door open and entered, closing it behind him.

"That's sensible," he said amiably. "I knew you wouldn't want the door forced."

P. O. Stanley had stepped back against the wall as if he needed support. Inside the blue silk pajamas he was short, sagging, corpulent. His hands were soft and puffy. His eyes above the red beard were puffy also with dark circles under them. His red hair was thinning on top. Little red tufts stuck out of his ears. His nose hooked out of the red tangle like the curved beak of a fat vulture.

That was what Stanley reminded him of, Jerry Prince thought, with a faint feeling of disgust. A vulture gone fat and gross from excessive feeding on the carcasses of helpless victims. Only now

the vulture was more like jelly. His puffy hands shook. His shoulders sagged. His knees seemed on the point of knocking together as he stared mutely.

"Who are you?" he got out thickly.

Jerry Prince's smile had an edge of steel behind it. "I am the eagle-eyed blood hound who's run you down," he said cheerfully.

Stanley's voice, which one could easily imagine had once been rich and pompous, authoritative and arrogant when the occasion served, trembled now in a half-whine of denial. "There's some mistake!"

"Nice for you if there is."

"I'm not—my name is not Stanley! J. Milroy Parsons is the name, sir. Who are you?"

Jerry Prince leaned against the door and contemplated the other thoughtfully. He was in no hurry. There was all night to do this. He felt no compunction about what was coming. Felt only gratefulness, that the gods of fortune had smiled so generously.

What else but those same elusive gods of fortune could have led him to the race track this afternoon? What else could have jogged his almost photographic memory to probe beneath the red beard, seeing there a different man from the one the world about them saw? And to see at one sweep just what it might mean?

Jerry had lost his interest in the races for the afternoon. He had discreetly trailed the red beard in its perambulations from parimutuel machines to the wide concrete apron before the stands. Lost in the crowd behind this man's shoulder he had watched a pair of fine field glasses hover over the hooked nose, and hoped generously that Red Beard would win his bets. The more cash on hand, the better, for there had been only one thought in Jerry's Prince's mind from the first moment that startled recognition had come.

Now he said: "Sit down on the bed

there. Let me do the talking. Don't whine about the name you're registered under. It doesn't get over at all."

IT HAD all been very easy. For Jerry had simply followed the Red Beard from the race track to the hotel, had stood almost at Red Beard's shoulder when he asked for his room key, and had been greeted by the clerk under his assumed name. Then Jerry had retired to the public library and there scanned the newspaper files for three months back. Having found what he sought in the afternoon paper where he remembered it, he drove to the newspaper office and purchased an old copy of that particular paper. There had been a picture in it of a short, corpulent man with a small, neat, black mustache and wavy black hair. Jerry had the picture in his pocket now.

This man before him was not as corpulent as the one in the picture. His red hair was thin and scanty. His entire beard was red. But the eyes were the same—small, squinting, slightly protruding.

"Now then," said Jerry Prince calmly, "where's the loot, you blood-sucking old pirate?"

"I—I don't understand you!"

And it seemed in that moment that Jerry Prince became another man. The easy debonairness he had brought to the room vanished. He became cold, harsh, threatening. "You *will* understand me," he rapped out. "Where's that hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars you lit out with before your company failed?"

"My company failed?"

"Exactly! Stanley and Company, that once respectable firm of commission brokers, just off La Salle Street in Chicago. There had been gossip you were in difficulty. You denied it emphatically, but you knew the end was in sight. And while you urged your customers to deposit cash with you, you were getting your

reserves together and making plans to skip out. Three months ago you vanished with a hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars in cash."

Stanley's pudgy hand thrust out as if to ward off the words. "No!" he cried. "You're wrong! You're insane! I recall that case. I remember descriptions of Stanley, seeing his picture in the paper. Stanley had black hair and a black mustache. You fool! Look at me! Any man in his right senses would know I couldn't be Stanley."

"I see you," Jerry Prince assented coldly. "Half an eye can tell you're a crook. At that you are clever, Stanley. You almost got by with it. No one knew that you had red hair when you came to Chicago. No one knew you kept your head shaved for that bushy toupee you wore. Your customers didn't suspect your mustache was dyed. You must have had something like this in mind for years, and when the time came you threw away your black toupee, let what little red hair you had grow out, let your red beard grow naturally. And you've been walking about openly ever since."

"A fantastic story!" the man on the bed denied vehemently. But there was fear in his eyes.

"Fantastic but for one thing, Stanley. You had to buy black hair dye for your mustache. You bought it at the same place all the time. That little hole-in-the-wall drugstore on South Halstead Street."

And then the lurking fear in those little eyes flamed into horrified unbelief. "What do you know about a drugstore on Halstead Street?"

"I happened to be in Chicago at the time you skipped out. I stopped in that drugstore for some razor blades. A little weedy clerk got to talking about your disappearance. He told me that a man who answered your description used to stop in

there every month or so and purchase hair dye. Black hair dye, Stanley. He wondered if it could be the same man. And so did I—until I saw you this afternoon at the race track. I knew then. Where's the cash you skipped with?"

Stanley groaned, cast a harried, desperate look about the room. "I've said enough! I'll not talk any more!" he wrenched out stubbornly.

JERRY PRINCE took a step away from the door. His face was a cold mask. He leaned forward slightly, dropped his voice to a caressing sympathetic note. "Did you ever hear of the third degree, Stanley?"

The man on the bed stared at him, wide-eyed, uneasy, mute.

"They use rubber hoses, you fat little double-crosser," Jerry Prince said gently.

The man on the bed shrank, as the vision took form before his eyes. "You people wouldn't dare do anything like that!" he jerked out thickly.

He was under the impression that he was talking to a member of the police department. Jerry Prince was content that it was so. He smiled and said nothing.

Stanley wet his lips with the end of his tongue. "I'll pay you," he suddenly offered hoarsely. "Ten thousand cash if you'll walk out of the hotel for half an hour."

Jerry lifted his eyebrows. "So you've got it here with you?"

"N—no!" Stanley stammered.

"If I saw ten thousand cash right now it might be an inducement," Jerry mused.

Stanley seized on that faint hope avidly. "I can give it to you now," he offered eagerly.

"I thought so. Lying right up to the end, aren't you? If it's here in the room I can find it. How much have you got left Stanley?"

And the man who no longer denied he was Stanley seemed on the verge of collapse as he said dully: "I've only spent about five thousand."

"A hundred and seventy thousand left, eh? Trot it out!"

Stanley heaved himself off the bed with an effort. Hope had left him and strength had followed. He fairly tottered as he crossed the room to the closet. Slowly he opened the door, reached in, brought out a stout pigskin traveling bag.

"Here," he said huskily.

The bag was locked. "Where is the key?"

Stanley's trousers were across the chair back. He went to them, fished out a key ring, selected the key and held it out silently. He seemed to be moving in a daze.

Jerry Prince felt little sympathy for the man. The price of his honor was in this pigskin traveling bag which he unlocked and opened. There it was! Packet after packet of currency. None of the bills were large. All were readily negotiable.

Jerry lifted out a package of twenties, flipped through them and put them back. He paid little attention to Stanley's dragging progress over toward the bureau—until the crashing sound of a pistol shot brought him whirling around.

CHAPTER TWO

The Girl Angle

STANLEY'S pudgy hand held a revolver to his temple. He swayed like a drunken man there by the half-open bureau drawer from which he had taken the gun. And then with staring eyes and mute lips, already dead on his feet, he fell full length to the floor. The revolver flew from his fingers and skidded across the rug.

Jerry Prince had expected nothing like this. Mechanically he noted the little

spiral of smoke still curling out of the gun barrel; saw the blood starting from the hole in Stanley's temple.

Grim, mocking justice here—for Jerry Prince had not intended turning Stanley over to the police. It had seemed justice enough to set him adrift in the world without a penny.

And it was justice of another kind, too. Stanley's act had struck back hard, upsetting Jerry's carefully laid plans. That shot had certainly been heard outside the room. It would be reported, investigated. The police would come on the scene. To think was to act with Jerry Prince. He closed the bag, dropped the keys in his pocket and turned toward the door.

And just then there was a sharp knock on the panel!

Jerry stopped short, staring at the door. He was trapped in the room. He had no gun, never carried one if he could help it. But now he wheeled back and caught Stanley's revolver off the floor; and as he did that the door opened and a girl slipped into the room.

Jerry barely had time to slip the gun in his pocket. She was in the room, the door closed behind her before she saw him. And then she stopped short, eyes widening. "Where is Stanley?" she burst out. "I thought I heard a shot along here!"

Jerry had never seen her before, but he knew the type. She was almost thirty and life had not dealt gently with her. Her clothes were expensive, stylish. Her face was carefully made up. But behind all that she was hard.

And then she saw Stanley.

Her palm went against her mouth, holding it mute. The color drained from her cheeks, leaving them haggard, rouged-stained. But she dropped her hand almost instantly and spoke, brittle accusation in her voice.

"You killed him, eh? Who are you?"

"He shot himself," Jerry said briefly. "Who are you? Where did you come from? Have you got a room on this hall?"

"I was coming up to see him," she said in a husky voice. "I heard the shot just before I turned into this corridor. Never mind who I am. What are you doing here? That's his bag, isn't it?"

Jerry spoke to her in the only language a woman of her type would understand. "I'm going out of here, sister, and one shout out of you will make it just too bad."

"You killed him!" she guessed. "You're taking his money!"

And by that she lost her role of innocent bystander. She knew who Stanley was, knew his bag was full of money.

"Get back there in the closet! I'm going to lock you in!" Jerry snapped.

Fear grew in her eyes. "I can't stay in here!" she gasped. "They'll pin it on me!" She swung around to the door, panic-stricken.

Jerry caught her shoulder, stopped her. "Don't rush out there," he warned icily.

"I'm going!" she panted. "Don't try to stop me! I'll—I'll scream!"

JERRY'S estimating glance saw that fear had swept aside her hard-boiled self-possession. There was guilt of some sort on her conscience. She did not want to face the police. If she fled in her state of mind, she could not help but attract attention. He made the best of a bad business.

"Let me go first," he ordered. "Keep your mouth shut and do what I tell you to."

As he expected, the cold note of authority in his voice steadied her. "All right, go ahead," she said sulkily, stepping back from the door.

Jerry opened it cautiously, looked out. He was just in time to see the frightened

face of a woman across the hall peering through her door at him. At sight of him she closed her door and locked it.

Two swift silent steps put Jerry across the hall at her door. He heard a frightened, agitated voice saying: "Hello—hello, is this the desk?"

Jerry frowned. The lobby was blocked now. Sam Winston, the house detective, would begin to spread a net in seconds.

Jerry's eye went to that red glowing bulb at the end of the corridor where a sign said, "FIRE ESCAPE."

The strange girl was out in the hall with him. "Hurry and get out of here!" she begged, with a note of hysteria in her voice, starting down the corridor.

Again Jerry's hand stopped her. "You can't go that way," he said calmly. "Get back there to the fire escape."

And again she obeyed without question. As she went, Jerry wasted precious seconds at the door of Stanley's room. Whipping out a handkerchief he scrubbed both sides of the door knob. That was the only thing he had touched.

The girl had opened the fire-escape door and darted out. "Put a handkerchief over your fingers," Jerry warned her. He wiped off any prints she might have left on the door and stepped after her into the cool night air, closing the door behind him with his handkerchief. The girl was already on her way down. Jerry followed, bag in one hand, handkerchief covering his other hand. Down, down, flight after flight.

Down seven flights to the bottom landing of the escape. The girl halted there, peering into the dark void below. Jerry put his weight on the counter-balanced ladder before them. It slipped down with a slight creaking of cables.

Up at the ninth landing the door opened. Heavy feet tramped on the iron work up there. A powerful flashlight stabbed down toward them.

"That's him down there!" a voice shouted. "Hey you—halt!"

Jerry swung over on the ladder, gripping the suitcase tightly. His weight brought the ladder down all the way. He descended nimbly, and the girl followed.

The rough cobblestoned alley came up to meet Jerry's feet. Overhead a pistol roared. The dull smack of the bullet on the stones close by marked narrow escape. Two more shots roared out, the reports echoing loudly in the narrow alley. Jerry saw a pedestrian stop at the mouth of the alley and peer in toward the excitement. Escape that way was impossible now. The girl dropped beside him.

"Back this way," he directed hurriedly.

TOGETHER they ran back into the alley. The flashlight beam stabbed after them. Shot after shot roared down at them, but neither of them was struck. Jerry turned into an intercepting alley and the light vanished, the shots stopped.

A red tail-light glowed dimly ahead. Cowl-lights outlined the shiny hood of an automobile. Too late to stop now—they had to pass. But as Jerry and his companion came abreast of the machine, Jerry stopped suddenly. It was a taxi. The driver's dark form was hunched behind the wheel. His pale face peered out at them. "Got a fare?" Jerry panted.

"Waitin' for one."

"You've got another! Ten-dollar tip in it. Drive out of here, quick!"

Jerry jerked the door open, pushed his companion in. He had to keep her away from the police if possible. She had his description. As he dropped into the rear seat, slamming the door, shoving the bag between his legs, the motor spun into life. The taxi lurched ahead. They careened out into a cross street, lurched around the next corner, sped on. The driver said over his shoulder: "Want me to dodge around a little?"

He was a wise one, evidently had heard enough to guess that they were fugitives.

"You'd better," Jerry agreed, and relaxed, regaining his breath, thinking hard.

That woman across the hall had gotten a good look at his face. The elevator man would be able to amplify it. They'd have a dragnet thrown out over the city in no time. Trains, boats, exit roads would be watched and this driver—he'd be able to identify Jerry, too. He seemed to know his business. He doubled around corner after corner, rolling fast, and presently he slid back the glass window and said over his shoulder: "Where to now?"

"Where do you want me to drop you?"

Jerry asked his companion.

She had been sitting in taught, strained silence. At his question she turned her head, stared at him enigmatically. "I don't want to be dropped," she said in her husky voice. "I'll go with you."

"Not with me," Jerry refused flatly.

He saw a hard, smile curve her red lips. "Oh, yes I will," she told him confidently. "Do you want me to put my head out the window and yell for help?"

And she had him there. He couldn't tell whether she was bluffing or not. He dared not risk it. He swore silently to himself. "Take us back to Third and Central," he directed the driver.

A hand closed on his wrist warningly. "That's near the Royale!"

"I know it," Jerry assented curtly.

"The—the police will be around there!"

Jerry smiled mirthlessly. "All the better if you decide to scream, sister."

THE taxi swung into the curb at Third and Central. "Get out," Jerry ordered his companion curtly. He followed her and handed the driver four five-dollar bills. "Keep the change," he said, "and drive on."

"Thanks, buddy!" the driver exclaimed. He peered wisely at them for an instant, and then the gears rasped and he rolled away.

Jerry's companion looked cynically after the cab. "He'll go for the cops now that he's got his dough," she commented.

"Undoubtedly," Jerry agreed. "Suppose we part right here?"

"No," she refused stubbornly. "I'm going with you."

Central Avenue, where they stood, was in the very heart of the theatre and shopping district. At this hour of the evening the sidewalks were still crowded, the curbs lined with parked machines, and traffic was flowing busily on both sides of the street. Jerry cast one swift look about, saw nothing menacing at the moment, and said to his companion: "All right, come along. But try not to look as if a dick had his hand on your shoulder."

"Wise guy, aren't you?" she snapped. But nevertheless she followed at his side with a slightly more leisurely air.

Jerry walked one block, turned left.

His companion gasped: "That's the Royale right ahead! What are you going to do?"

"Keep quiet," said Jerry coldly. "You asked for it. Now like it."

He walked on until they were almost opposite the hotel. Police uniforms were visible over there. A traffic man was keeping them out of the street, warning passing machines not to stop. And on the side where Jerry and his companion walked, other pedestrians stood along the curb, staring.

Indifferent glances were cast at them as the line parted unwillingly. Jerry opened the rear door of a big blue sedan parked at the curb and tossed the pigskin bag in carelessly. Smiling pleasantly, he stepped in the car ahead of his companion

and thrust a key into the ignition lock.

She followed, closing the door behind her. "Is this your auto?" she asked doubtfully as Jerry pressed the starter.

"Doesn't matter, does it? We're using it." And backing slowly, Jerry steered out from the curb and drove easily down the street.

Jerry ignored her as he thought fast. The carefully laid details of his program had been smashed. First, by Stanley killing himself. Who would have thought the man would do that? And now this girl at his side

A frown broke across Jerry's face. She was an unknown quantity. Stanley had been alone at the race track during the afternoon. His room suggested no woman—and yet she had walked in without knocking.

She knew about Stanley's money and she was deathly afraid of being arrested in connection with Stanley's death. But she had stubbornly refused to flee when she had the chance. Jerry knew her type well enough to be sure she was not staying with him for safety's sake. She had fought fear to stay with him—and the money. That was it. The money!

She spoke first, in her husky voice. "Where are you going?"

"That," said Jerry "depends. Where do you want me to leave you?"

She ignored the suggestion.

Jerry shrugged. "Never mind. What's your connection with Stanley?"

"I met him," she said shortly. "And don't put me on the pan. I'm not talking. What I want to know is—what are you going to do with that money?"

Jerry grinned. "You wise girls all sing the same ballad. Who rang your name on this cash register?"

"I did," was the energetic answer. "And I'm staying with you until we get

it added up. Does that two and two make four?"

"Five, lady. You wreck me when you talk like that. But remember the coppers. You'd make a great splash on the front pages."

"I'll tell them," she said coldly, "how I found you in the room with Stanley. I'll swear you shot him. I'll shoot the works and swear you made me come along with you when you took it on the lam. Laugh that off, wise guy."

"They boiled you for an hour," Jerry admitted. "What do you want, stranger—a split?"

And her reply was startling. "All of it, sucker. When you get ready to talk business, put it on the line." She folded her arms and sat back firmly.

Jerry turned his head and smiled at her again, thinly. "What do I get out of it?" he asked gently.

"A chance to skip town and forget about it. That's better than a murder rap, isn't it?"

"Quite," Jerry agreed politely.

She flashed him the barest glance of uncertainty. "You don't talk like a mug," she commented.

Jerry swung the blue sedan around another corner. "Thanks for the compliment," he told her.

She frowned, set her lips as she stared through the windshield.

"Did you know what you were doing with Stanley?" Jerry asked her casually.

"I did."

"What?"

She flared: "You ask too many questions! I know what I'm doing with *you*."

Jerry hunched his shoulders, blew for a car ahead, and shot around it. "You seem to," he said briskly. "Going to call the police? There's one on the corner."

Her sulky lips set tight. She was silent as they rolled past the traffic man.

"You see," said Jerry. "Now what?"

"This!" she said through her teeth. Her hand had been under her coat. It slipped swiftly out as she spoke. The gun that shoved into his side was a small derringer.

The diminutive weapon was lost in her soft hand, but the dashlight showed its two barrels calibered large. Death pressed there against his side; death absurdly small but no less certain.

CHAPTER THREE

Enter—Sergeant Smith

JERRY took his foot off the accelerator and let the sedan roll slower. "Put that thing up," he said evenly. "It might go off."

Her husky voice came back as even as his. "You're telling me, sucker? What do you think I'm carrying it for?"

"Well, one wonders."

"You won't call a copper," she said. "The heat's on you too bad. Drive out the North Shore Road. And take your hands off that wheel, try any tricks, and I'll let you have it—and yell bloody murder you're kidnaping me. I'll make it stick too."

"I wonder," Jerry mused.

The little derringer shoved harder in his side.

Jerry shrugged once more. "I believe you'd do it. The North Shore Road, you said?"

"You heard me."

"Then," said Jerry blithely, "the North Shore Road it is. And if any of your friends see us riding I hope they won't think I've picked you up."

She sniffed, said nothing.

Beyond the steamship docks the lighted boulevard swept around the north shore of the bay, through the smart country-club district, finally debouching on the sea coast and continuing north. There the houses thinned out, the lights van-

ished; fields, patches of woodland and open country stretched under the moonlight. Now and then the open sea was visible off to the right, the restless swells glinting faintly in the moonlight.

When the last house, the last light had been left behind, and the road stretched open and deserted in their headlight beams, Jerry glanced at his companion. "Where now?" he questioned.

"Straight ahead."

He drove on, a mile—two miles—five

She had been peering about anxiously, evidently looking for landmarks. She said now, suddenly: "Turn just ahead by that dead tree to your right."

It was a narrow dirt road cutting off toward the beach. Jerry swung into it, rolled through the black shadows by a small patch of trees and came out into the moonlight again on open meadow land with the ocean visible ahead.

"Stop here," she ordered abruptly.

Jerry obeyed.

"Now get out," she directed.

Jerry sat still with his hands on the wheel. "Are you taking me for a ride?"

She prodded him with the derringer. "You're safe if you don't start anything. Get out."

"I see," said Jerry softly. He slipped from behind the wheel, left the car and looked back in at her. She was faintly visible beyond the wheel, holding the derringer on him through the open window.

"Walk away from the car, sucker."

Jerry backed up slowly, a wry smile on his lips in the moonlight.

She slid over behind the wheel, stepped on the starter. And as the motor caught one white hand thrust out into the moonlight and waved mockingly. The big blue sedan shot off down the narrow dirt road.

JERRY stared at the receding tail-light. He sighed, lighted a cigarette, returned to the road. Somewhere back in

the patch of trees they had passed an owl hooted mournfully. Jerry watched the fast receding lights of his car with growing interest. The narrow dirt road seemed to run straight into the sea. There were no houses about. It looked as if she would have to turn by the beach and come back this way to reach the highway.

Jerry sighed again philosophically and reached in his coat. His hand brought out Stanley's revolver—and he stood there waiting for the return of his car. A bullet through the gas tank or a tire would do perfectly, he decided.

The sedan rolled almost to the beach. It turned suddenly to the right and began to parallel the ocean with undiminished speed. It had gone all of a quarter of a mile before Jerry took out his handkerchief, wiped the revolver and hurled it out into the night. Shrugging with resignation he began the dusty trek back to the highway. A second road evidently paralleled the beach—one she must have known was there. Before he reached the trees he saw the now distant headlights swing back toward the highway on a third road; and presently they vanished, heading back toward the city.

The highway was dark, deserted when Jerry reached it. He turned toward the city, striding briskly. Two miles and half a dozen machines had passed him, none of them halting for his uplifted arm. The heavy rumble of a truck finally came from behind and slowed to his signal.

"Thumbin' your way pretty late at night, mister," a gruff voice called from the dark cab. "Climb in."

And when Jerry had done so and the truck was rumbling on, the stocky driver hunched over the wheel grunted: "You don't look like a hiker. Dressed too swell."

"A pretty girl took me for a one way drive," Jerry explained.

"Huh—and she dumped you out? I'll be damned!" The trucker burst into a roar of laughter.

"Quite right," Jerry agreed amiably. "I'll know better next time."

The truck was bringing baled hay to the city market. It carried Jerry to within a block of Central, in the heart of the city. While it halted momentarily for a red light, Jerry shoved a five-dollar bill into the driver's hand, swung down, and stepped to the sidewalk.

The truck rumbled on, and a huge, ungainly figure which had been loitering against the building wall moved out across the sidewalk. A vast round pinkish face grinned at Jerry with childlike pleasure.

"If it ain't Jerry Prince! Just the young man I wanted to see."

Jerry's quick frown of annoyance shaded off into a smile of delight. "Sergeant Smith, the wonder sleuth," he greeted cheerfully. "You smother me with pleasure, Sergeant. Let's see—you haven't been under foot for at least forty-eight hours, have you?"

SERGEANT Pincus Smith, of the robbery detail at headquarters, was a massive man, colossal. He bulged fore and aft, top and bottom. Sergeant Smith was frankly fat.

"Let's take a walk, Jerry," Sergeant Smith suggested placidly.

Jerry Prince's eyes narrowed. Some of the humor vanished from his face. "Walk? Do my ears hear right, Sergeant? Are you suggesting that I might be under arrest?"

Sergeant Smith's vast pinkish cheeks shook as he sighed and wagged his head in denial. His childlike features showed hurt; his voice sounded even more so. "Now Jerry, you oughtn't to talk like that. What could I be taking you in for? Haven't been doing anything that would land you at headquarters have you?"

Sergeant Smith's little eyes, sunk deep in folds of flesh, were bland and innocent. Here was a man, one would swear, who lumbered through life mentally as well as physically.

And Jerry Prince, meeting that bland and innocent look, hoped his own face was as guileless. For he knew as few men did what foxlike cunning lurked behind that pinkish, childlike face. Sergeant Smith for all his artlessness, his fat clumsiness, had one of the keenest brains at headquarters.

"What would I be doing that would land me at headquarters, Sergeant?" Jerry asked with pained indignation. "If I remember rightly, I never have been on your books."

Sergeant Smith slipped a massive hand under Jerry's elbow. "Let's walk," he said. "I think better when I'm moving, Jerry."

As they strolled off Sergeant Smith admitted: "I don't know of anything against you, Jerry. Far as I'm concerned you've got a clean bill of health. Honest, upright young feller. But you can't blame me for being curious, Jerry. Guess it's envy. Here I work days and nights, and just barely get by—and you never work and always have the best in town. Makes me curious, Jerry."

"Investments," Jerry explained gravely. "I've told you about those investments of mine, Sergeant. They make me—er—a capitalist." Jerry chuckled. "Ever see one of the species?"

Sergeant Smith wagged his big head. "Sure I have, Jerry. But I never seen a capitalist yet that carried a gun under his arm. You wearing your rod tonight, Jerry?" As Sergeant Smith asked the question he ran one fat hand nimbly over Jerry's coat.

"No gun," Jerry said calmly. "But

I have a legal permit for one, Sergeant. Like to see it?"

SERGEANT Smith wagged his head again. "We've been all over that permit before, Jerry. Judge Casson issued it—just before he got run out of office. But that still leaves me wondering about that hay truck."

"Always wanted to ride in a hay truck," Jerry confided. "It's the poet in me, Sergeant. Back to nature and the rugged life."

Sergeant Smith shifted his battered old hat to the other side of his head. He blinked, coughed deprecatingly. "How'd you get out in the country where you picked up that truck?"

"What makes you think I was in the country, Sergeant?"

"You don't tip a driver heavy for riding a few blocks," Sergeant Smith said placidly. "I can find out from that driver, if you're going to be coy, Jerry. I got his number."

"The fact is," Jerry admitted, "I was out on the North Shore Road."

"How'd you get out there?"

"An automobile."

"Whose?"

"I wouldn't know whose car it is right now," Jerry said dreamily. "Cars have a way of getting about."

"Who's got it now?" Sergeant Smith asked bluntly.

Jerry grinned. "Leave me a few secrets, Sergeant. You're giving me a going over right here in the street. Just what's on your mind?"

Sergeant Smith managed to look shocked. "Why, Jerry! This is only a friendly little gabfest. Where was you between nine and ten this evening?"

"Riding," said Jerry casually.

"Hmmm," said Sergeant Smith in his throat. "Feller was killed in the Royale Hotel this evening, Jerry. Up on the

ninth floor. Lady across the hall seen one of the guilty parties going out."

Jerry Prince stopped. He took a cigarette from his pocket, put it between his lips, lighted it. His hand was steady as he held the cigarette. "Are you accusing me of anything?" Jerry asked slowly.

Sergeant Smith eyed him for a moment, and then shrugged his vast shoulders, with all the effect of a heave running through a mountain of dough. "Not accusing you of anything, Jerry. Seems to me you're mighty touchy this evening."

"Going to take me in?"

"I should say not. Nothing against you."

"Then I'll be on my way, Sergeant. Getting sleepy. Not used to staying up so late."

Sergeant Smith nodded mournfully. "That's right. Home's the best place for a man. Makes you wealthy an' wise, Jerry. See you again sometime."

Sergeant Smith waved a massive paw, and loitered at the curb as Jerry walked on. One immense hand was caressing the sergeant's jaw as Jerry turned the next corner and vanished. Not until then did Sergeant Smith move; and then he lumbered hastily across the street toward the winking neon sign that marked an all-night drugstore—and telephoned.

CHAPTER FOUR

Murder to Music

JERRY PRINCE might have been a debonair young man returning from the theater or a call upon his best girl when he walked out of Sergeant Smith's sight. He did not change his pace or manner as he threaded a leisurely way through the nearby theater district.

Finally he hailed a taxi, gave the address of the apartment house where he lived. He smoked thoughtfully until the cab stopped before the tall stone building. As Jerry paid his bill he looked up and

down the street. Fifty yards away, across the street, a small touring car was parked at the curb, lights out, as if it might be there for the night. By looking close one could just make out two figures in the front seat.

Jerry grinned to himself. "For twenty dollars could you stay here until morning?" he asked the driver. "And for another five tell anyone who questions you that you're waiting for me?"

"For twenty-five dollars, mister," the driver said fervently, "I'd park here until you grow a beard. Can I go to sleep?"

"Snore if you care to," Jerry chuckled, taking cash from his billfold.

"O. K.," the driver agreed, taking the money. "It may be a gag, but as long as I've got the dough, I'll stooge."

The driver, small, wizened, hardboiled, watched his fare enter the building, looked at the bills in his hand, and pocketed them, grinning. Pulling his cap over his eyes, he settled down in the seat.

The elevator was automatic at this hour of the night. Jerry ran the cage up to the sixth floor, let himself into a luxurious apartment done in modernistic style. He turned on the lights, tossed his hat on a divan, began to pace the room, wrinkling his brows in thought.

Every few moments he walked into the bedroom, which was still dark, pulled the curtain aside slightly and looked down at the street.

The room was at the corner of the building. By looking straight down one could see the cab parked at the curb and the small touring car across the street. It had not moved or displayed any lights. After the third trip into the bedroom Jerry stayed by the window.

He was rewarded. A full quarter of an hour after he had entered the building a dark figure stepped suddenly from the touring car and walked to the taxi.

Down there in the street the driver

was dozing as an authoritative hand clapped down on his shoulder. A gruff voice asked: "What are you waiting here for?"

"Hey, lay off that shoulder! . . . Oh, hello, officer. Something wrong?"

"I said how long are you going to park here?"

"Got a fare inside, officer. No regulations against parking here. What's eating you?"

"Young fellow? Slimmish?"

"Yeah, that's him," the driver nodded. "Something sour about him? You want him?"

"No. When's he coming out?"

The driver shrugged again. "Should I know that? He said to wait for him."

The interrogator stepped back, scowled up at the brace of lighted windows on the sixth floor and grunted: "All right—forget you seen me if you want to keep healthy tonight." He walked back to the patrol car where his partner sat.

And from that dark window on the sixth floor Jerry Prince witnessed what had transpired and chuckled to himself. He left the window, went back into the big living room and scooped up his hat from the divan. He was at the door when the telephone rang sharply.

Jerry halted, hesitated, went to the telephone and answered it. The gentle voice of Sergeant Smith greeted him. "Surprise, Jerry! I thought I'd call up an wish you happy dreams."

"No surprise, Sergeant. I had a feeling you might call. How's your rheumatism tonight?"

"Kind of achy, Jerry. It twinges me fierce now and then."

"Excellent, Sergeant. I don't know when I've heard anything that pleases me more. And now I'm going to plug the bell for the rest of the night, in case you have another brain storm and wake me

up. I need my sleep. Early to bed, you know."

"I know, Jerry. It was me that taught you that, wasn't it? One thing more, Jerry, did you lose an automobile tonight? A blue sedan?"

"Why?"

"Found one. It sideswiped a car at the edge of the theater district. Dodged around the next corner and was abandoned at the curb."

"What makes you think it's my car?"

"Your license number, Jerry."

"You would have that, Sergeant. It may be my car. I haven't reported the theft yet because I didn't think it would do any good."

"A woman was driving it, Jerry."

"You don't say!"

Sergeant Smith's voice was patient, almost pleading. "You don't know who she was, Jerry?"

"If I did, I'd have gotten my car myself," Jerry said calmly. "Tell headquarters to hold it until morning."

"Bring it up tonight if you want."

"No. I'll be asleep. Won't answer the door. 'Night."

"'Night, Jerry," Sergeant Smith sighed. "See you tomorrow maybe." The receiver clicked at the other end.

Jerry turned to the table, ripped a sheet from a magazine and fashioned a small paper plug with which he silenced the bell effectively. Then he left the apartment, leaving the lights on.

The building was silent, deserted, as Jerry walked to the back and descended the service stairs to the small hall inside the rear entrance. He unlocked the door and stepped out into the night.

A carefully tended plot of grass, a cement walk, a back fence—and one came to a paved alley running through the middle of the block. Jerry walked down that alley to the cross street, turned to the right and strode off briskly.

Five minutes later he entered an all-night garage, lifted a hand in greeting to the attendant, and drove out in a black coupe that rolled with the quiet whisper of great reserve power.

THE houses on Creager Street were brick, sooty, dirty, old. Two and three stories high, they lined Creager Street in a solid scabrous wall to right and left. Here—when the wind blew right—the sweetish, sickish odor of gas came from the river gas works not far distant.

If one went along Creager Street to Haystead, and continued on five houses, then walked under the stone steps with their iron siderails, and passed a guarded door, one came into Micky Moore's place.

Micky Moore had gutted the building behind the sordid front and remade it into spacious rooms in bright colors, with wide stairs, perfect service, excellent food. In short, Micky Moore's was one of the swellest little speaks in the city. And bustling about with a grin on his face and a ready greeting to all, Micky Moore played the perfect host.

Jerry Prince passed the guarded door, walked upstairs to the big oval, chromium bar.

There was music and loud talk at this midnight hour. No one paid any attention to him.

To the white-aproned barkeep he said: "Brandy."

He stood there drinking in tiny sips, looking about without seeming to do so. The usual scattering of uptown people were present, young and middle-aged, working hard at having a hilarious time. There were men, too, whom Sergeant Smith knew well.

A few moments later Micky Moore himself hustled in, saw Jerry and came over, all five feet two inches of his stocky person radiating cordiality.

"Glad to see you, Jerry!" And Micky Moore's handshake suggested he meant it. How's it go?"

Slow," said Jerry. "But your brandy gets better all the time, Micky."

Micky Moore nodded, smiling. He said with a trace of pride: "If there's better stuff on the market, I'll try to get it. The next is on me, Jerry."

There was no sham about the glasses they raised to each other. Micky Moore ran an honest place, gave the best service he could, and never drank with a customer unless his heart was in it.

"You know pretty much what's going on," Jerry said casually as he set his glass on the edge of the bar.

"I guess so," Micky Moore nodded. "Most of them make this place sooner or later; an' I gotta lot of friends."

"Who lands booze at Elbow Point?"

Micky Moore raised his brandy glass slowly. His eyes were shrewd, questioning as he looked over the rim. "Not turning government on us, Jerry?"

"Be yourself."

"Sure. I know. That's almost over anyway. The boys started easing into other lines months ago."

"But they're still bringing it in."

Micky smiled, looked at the soft brown liquid in his glass. "Still got to have it for the trade, Jerry. What's on your mind? Didn't know you ever mixed in the booze game."

"I don't. Just curious."

"I know you ain't a talker," Micky said bluntly. "And I guess you could find out anyway. Dave Manners' boys use Elbow Point a lot, I've heard. It's handy to town and the highway, and for some reason they haven't been bothered there. Protection's good, I guess. Anything else?"

"Ever see a girl who looks like this?" Jerry carefully described his companion of the evening.

Micky Moore closed one eye shrewdly, opened it at the finish, and said promptly: "That sounds like Daisy Dulane, Dave Manners' girl. Not falling for that dame, are you, Jerry?"

"Women aren't my trouble," Jerry chuckled. "What about her, Micky? You know most of the dirt floating around town."

"She used to be a showgirl," Micky declared. "Dave met her on Broadway and took her out of the chorus. She's straight for Dave. No horsing around."

"None?"

"Well, serious, y'understand. Dave don't keep a rope around her neck, but they're both that way about each other. I've even heard Dave married her."

"Dave Manners hangs out at the Harlequin Club, doesn't he?"

"Most nights. He owns a cut of it."

Jerry tossed a half-dollar on the bar top and turned away. "I'll do the same for you some time, Micky."

THE black coupe whispered its way uptown and stopped across the street from the Harlequin Club. Jerry looked about for a moment, and then leaned forward and felt under the dashboard. From a clip, above the nest of wires behind the panel, he brought out a small thirty-two caliber automatic, snub-nosed and flat. It slipped neatly into a pocket tailored in the inside of his coat and strengthened clear to his shoulder so the weight would not sag. It was practically invisible.

The gaiety was rising to post-midnight heights when Jerry strolled into the Harlequin Club. The small dance floor was jammed. The tables were all occupied. Gaudily dressed waiters darted here and there through the gay cacophony; and the blonde at the check window smiled as she met Jerry's grin.

"Dave Manners here tonight?" Jerry asked her.

"He was. I think he went out a little while ago."

"Ah," said Jerry. "And would you be knowing where he went?"

"I would not," said the blonde with somewhat less cordiality. One gathered that the employees did not touch on such matters to strangers.

And at Jerry's shoulder a suave voice said: "A table, sir?" It was the headwaiter, immaculate, affable, and, behind that first impression, hatchet-faced and brassy eyed.

"I'm looking for Mr. Manners," Jerry told him.

A brassy stare ran over him impersonally. "Sorry, sir. Mr. Manners has not been in this evening. Is there a message you wish to leave?"

"You might tell him," said Jerry delicately, "that his cousin just dropped in from Denmark. And the next time you lie like that, watch your left eyelid. It jerks when you lie."

"What's that? Me lie?" The headwaiter reddened. His veneer of politeness fractured visibly. "Listen," he said. "Don't come in here talkin' like that, mister. If it's an argument you want—"

"What is it, Gus? Something wrong. Ah, good evening—Mr. Prince, this is a pleasure. I don't believe we've ever had you here before."

The speaker was a blond, slender young man with a soft, drawling voice and a handsome, youthful face, now smiling pleasantly. The pale, tapering fingers of one hand were plucking at a button of his dinner coat as he spoke, and smiled at Jerry. Jerry remembered those fingers from previous meetings. They might have been on a woman's hand. And this young man had features so fine and pale and regular that they were almost feminine. He had soft, curly hair, a gentle, drawling voice, and an extraordinarily

gentle and winning smile as he stood there.

This was Babe Regan, partner of Dave Manners; and no hardened criminal who ever walked to the electric chair in Sing Sing had behind him a more blood spotted, ruthless career than he.

"I've just been asking for Dave Manners," Jerry said gently. "How is everything, Regan? Gambling much these days?"

Gus, the headwaiter, cut in with somewhat less acrimony: "He asked for Mr. Manners; and when I said Mr. Manners hadn't been in this evening, he called me a liar. I did not know the gentleman, Mr. Regan. I thought—er—"

Babe Regan's pale eyes, blue and dreamy, rested on Jerry Prince's face. "You made a mistake, Gus," he said. "Mr. Prince is always welcome here. Glad to answer any of his questions. So you're looking for Dave, Mr. Prince?"

"In passing."

"Rather late at night," Babe Regan suggested with a slow grin. "Anything in particular on your mind?"

"Sorry, no," Jerry shrugged. "I just don't like to be lied to, Regan."

"Gus didn't know who you were. He'll tell the truth after this." Babe Regan turned to his headwaiter. "D'you hear that, Gus? The truth always to Mr. Prince."

Gus's brassy eyes blinked once. He nodded, agreed colorlessly: "Sure. I'll watch it after this. Sorry, Mr. Prince." And with a nod he left them.

Babe Regan's face had been in profile. The side nearest Jerry had remained smiling, blank, but Jerry had the uncanny feeling that some signal had passed between the two men.

Babe Regan's soft, drawling voice said: "Dave hasn't been here this evening, Mr. Prince. I'm sorry I can't tell you where he is. If you will give me an idea of

what you want with him I'll see that he hears of it. He usually telephones in sometime before we close."

"It's nothing. Wasn't doing anything and thought I'd drop in and talk to Dave. I feel we should know each other better."

"Fine chap, Dave. Best fellow I ever hooked up with in business. Come back in my office and have a drink."

"Sorry. I'll dash along. Thanks just the same."

Babe Regan was standing near the hat-check window, the tapering fingers of one slender white hand still toying with the button of his coat when Jerry went out. Standing there—watching. . . .

THE hat-check girl, speaking casually, had told the truth. Gus, the head-waiter, had lied. Babe Regan, drawing, smiling, friendly, had lied too. Dave Manners had been at the Harlequin Club and had left a short time before. His departure was being covered up.

Jerry walked leisurely to the corner where a drugstore was still open. At the back he found the telephone directory. He found the address he sought, closed the book, went out.

Some fifty paces away a dapper young man was looking into a darkened shop window. He had not been in sight when Jerry entered the drugstore, and had no apparent reason for being there now. Jerry smiled faintly to himself, put a cigarette between his lips and touched a match to it. Out of the corner of his eye, as he did that, he saw the dapper young man glance once at him, furtively, and then return to his studious contemplation of the show window.

Jerry flipped the match away, noted that no one seemed to be loitering around his car parked across the street in the middle of the block. He turned his back on his car, stepped to the corner a few feet away and walked down the side

street with all the indifference of a young man not knowing exactly what to do with his time. He walked to the middle of the block, to the black mouth of an alley that cut to the right, behind the Harlequin Club. Two steps took Jerry into the blackness of the alley mouth.

He flattened himself there against the brick wall. His hand, as he waited, went inside his coat to the automatic nestling there; and slowly drew the gun out as the soft pad of hurrying steps came along the sidewalk.

The steps slowed as they neared the alley mouth. A dapper figure moved into view, peering cautiously into the blackness of the alley. Jerry was on it instantly, one hand grabbing for a coat lapel, the other shoving the automatic rudely in the dapper young man's middle. A yank, and they were both back in the shadows, the prisoner staggering as he was jerked along, stuttering in surprise and fear.

"Shut up!" said Jerry.

"What's the idea?" the dapper young man sputtered instead. "Is this a stick-up?"

Jerry transferred his grip from coat to neck. He screwed the gun deeper in the soft stomach muscles, shook his prisoner violently. "You rat!" he said pleasantly. "Did Babe Regan say you were apt to get a bullet in your gizzard if you followed me?"

"Babe Regan? Who's that, mister?"

Jerry put the muzzle of his automatic against his prisoner's lips.

"I'm going to ram this in your teeth and pry the truth out of you!" Jerry snarled suddenly. "What did Babe Regan tell you to do?"

"D-don't do that, mister! I remember now! It's all comin' back to me! I did see Babe Regan. He said somepin' about being curious where you were goin, an' asked me if I was walkin' that way to let him know. But, honest to God, mister,

it's nothin' to me. The Babe said there was a ten-spot in it. I need the dough."

"What else did he say?"

"That's all. I'll swear, so help me—"

The frantic denial cut off short as Jerry snapped the barrel of his automatic behind the dapper one's ear. The dapper one went limp. Jerry let him down to the alley cement, frisked him quickly. And in a leather shoulder holster under one arm he found an automatic.

There was a pile of ash cans a few paces further back. Jerry lifted the limp figure, carried it there, removed the cover from one of the ash cans and stuck the dapper one in, doubled up like a jack-knife.

Chuckling to himself, Jerry continued on through the alley to the next street, cut on back around to the black coupe and drove off.

But he was thoughtful now as he drove. Thoughtful over that dapper shadow which had been put on him. Babe Regan would not have done that without some cause.

THE telephone directory had given the residence of David Manners as Burlingame Drive. That was in the north part of town. It was a solid, substantial residential district, semi-smart, prosperous. The householders gave bridge parties, belonged to the country clubs, drove sizable cars. Dave Manners, solidly entrenched, free from most of the menaces of rival gunmen, was pleased to aspire to respectability in his leisure hours in that environment. Jerry recalled rumors that Dave Manners even belonged to the country club, keeping the underworld side of his life well in the background.

Lights were burning in Dave Manners' house. It sat on the corner in a huge lawn studded with big shade trees, a two-story brick house with a big glass sun porch in front. An automobile was parked at the curb in front. Through an open window

of his car Jerry could hear the faint strains of radio music inside the house. Callers seemed to be inside, gaiety, life. It was not what he had expected.

He turned in to the cross street, left the curb lights of Burlingame Drive behind. He parked in dark shadows in the middle of the block. No pedestrians were about at this hour. Most of the houses in the neighborhood were dark. Even wheeled traffic was conspicuous by its absence.

Jerry walked back to the corner of Dave Manners' property. A hedge bounded it, and a sloping bank some six feet high led up to the yard level. Jerry vaulted the hedge, slipped up the bank and cut through the dark shadows under the trees toward the rear of the house.

He could hear the radio music plainer now. It was turned on to heavy volume, was coming through a side window of the house, up several inches from the bottom.

The window curtains were all drawn. The radio drowned out any other sounds inside the house. Jerry walked to a screened back porch. The kitchen at least was dark. The screen door opened with slight creaks and let him on the back porch.

The back door was locked. Jerry brought out a small bunch of keys and began to fit them to the lock there in the darkness. One key finally opened the door. Food odors met him as he stepped inside. But the kitchen was silent, dark. The crashing, static-shot blare of the radio continued in the front of the house.

If there were other sounds, they were not audible. A tiny flash raked one silver sliver of light about the room, and Jerry moved across it. He made no more noise than a sliding shadow as he opened a door and passed through.

The sliver of light showed a cramped butler's pantry. Beyond that Jerry found a dining room, dark also. A door opposite him stood open an inch or so, admitting a crack of light. Jerry slipped to it, strain-

ing his ears for what might lie beyond; but only the raucous tintinnabulations of the radio came to them.

The tiny light beam in his hand swept to that door, dropped to the floor, halted, focused. Quick, noiseless steps took Jerry there. He stopped, staring, lips pursed in a noiseless whistle.

The light driving through that crack glinted on a dull crimson stream snaking under the edge of the door. Blood—fresh blood there on the floor.

JERRY PRINCE stood still for a long moment, staring at that fresh blood by his shoes. Slowly he drew the automatic from his coat. Wrapping his handkerchief about his left hand, he abruptly shoved the door open and stepped through.

He came into a library, carpeted with a thick oriental rug, furnished in heavy walnut. Book shelves lined the walls. And there on the waxed and polished hardwood, beside the costly, thick-piled oriental rug lay the source of that scarlet rivulet.

He was lying on his face, arms doubled under, one leg thrust out grotesquely. Sleek oiled hair glistened black in the overhead light. Saffron skin and slight, stocky stature marked the victim an oriental. The head lay nearest the door; and by a wound on that head he had died.

A second door, forward in the right wall, was closed. In this room, as in the others, the curtains were drawn. And through it throbbed the incessant tumult of the radio.

Jerry reached down, turned the body over. The neck he touched was limp, warm. Death had struck only recently at this Japanese house boy, struck violently at the sleek black-haired head, via some heavy blunt instrument. Struck more than once too. The saffron-hued knuckles of the right hand were bloody, bruised, as if the boy had clasped the back of his head to

protect it. Straightening, Jerry saw the print of bloody fingers on the door just above the knob.

It required no great effort of imagination to bring the scene back vividly. The boy had run across the room; run from death close behind. The first blows had not felled him. His bruised, bloody hand had reached out for the door knob. And one final crushing blow had stopped him, felled him there by the door.

Jerry wondered if the radio had been playing while that happened.

He turned from the body, crossed the room cautiously; and as he passed the big walnut library table he noted a set of books on it. Books that had been held upright between heavy bronze book ends. One of them had been removed and several of the books had fallen over. The book end rested at the edge of the table—and by its heavy bronze base a smudge of fresh blood stood out vividly on the polished wood. This then was the bludgeon which had felled that slight saffron figure.

Still using the handkerchief over his fingers, Jerry opened the closed door, finding a small entrance hall, lighted, deserted. Opposite him another door stood wide.

And from that lighted room across the hall the crashing static, the raucous music of the radio blared full strength. Jerry walked into a drawing room, suddenly no longer concerned as to who might be there before him. He knew. Death had swept through this house and the living were not around.

He was right. There stood the smart radio cabinet against the opposite wall, hurling its mechanical crescendos at him. There were the curtains stirring gently by the open window outside which he had stood. There, there . . .

Even Jerry, warned by the gruesome find in the library, was not prepared for it. Dave Manners, suave member of the higher underworld, lay on the floor near

the radio, as still, as inert as his dead house boy. Dave Manners, wearing a dinner coat and white shirt, his hair parted neatly in the middle, a big diamond on his left hand gleaming coldly.

Dave Manners lay on his side, eyes closed. He might have been asleep. But a great red splotch stained the snowy expanse of his shirt front; and lying lax in his right hand was a small nicked revolver. And there too on the floor by Dave Manners was a packet of twenty-dollar bills, blood-stained.

And the radio throbbed on loudly; playing for death as it must have played for life. Jerry swung to it abruptly with distaste, shut it off.

CHAPTER FIVE

"Calling All Cars"

DAVE MANNERS had been shot in the chest. With his handkerchief Jerry pulled the revolver from the limp fingers, sniffed the end of the barrel. It had not been fired. Manners had died before he could defend himself.

The blood-streaked packet of money told its own story. Dave Manners had been in here with Stanley's money; must have had that packet of bills in his hand when shot. Daisy Dulane must have been here with him too. Had she done this?

Jerry dismissed the thought quickly. That stylish, sophisticated young woman had never killed the Japanese house boy. She would not have brought the money to Dave Manners, her man, and killed him too. Was she in the house somewhere, still, lifeless, too?

Jerry's eyes went to the packet of twenty-dollar bills. His lean face went hard, bitter; his mouth pressed in a tight line. The blood smeared on them suddenly seemed symbolic. Innocent investors had suffered when their money had been stolen. Stanley had died over them. Dave Man-

ners lay here dead. Death had struck in the next room—

A dry, choked sob behind Jerry caused him to whirl abruptly.

He had put up his own gun. His hand streaking for it froze at the edge of his coat in obedience to a choked order.

"Stand still!"

"You!" Jerry exclaimed.

Daisy Dulane stood in a doorway, gun in her hand—a regulation-size automatic this time.

The girl's face was a drawn mask of grief, of suffering, out of which dark eyes blazed at him. Dark eyes, tear-wet, for she had been crying.

Her voice came thick, choked.

"So you found me? . . . Keep your hands away from your side!"

"I thought you were dead," Jerry said.

She ignored his words. "And you killed him!" she said in the same choked voice, brittle with accusation. The gun was steady in her hand as she took two steps forward from the doorway.

Jerry's eyes narrowed ever so slightly.

"I didn't kill him," he said. "I just got here. Where have you been? What do you know about this?"

"You're lying!" she said tonelessly, and took another step forward.

"You should know it's the truth. You've been here in the house."

But Jerry had the feeling he was talking to a wooden woman.

"You killed him!" she repeated, dully.

"Why should I kill him?" Jerry argued calmly. "I don't work that way."

"You killed Stanley for that money! You followed us here! You killed Dave!"

FOR the first time since they faced each other, her eyes left him, dropping for an instant to Dave Manners' body between them. She glanced at the packet of bills. A visible shiver ran through her. Her eyes came back to his face quickly.

"Where is it?" she flared at him. "The money! What did you do with it?"

"Haven't seen it," Jerry denied. "Snap out of it, Daisy Dulane. If I killed him, and had that money, why should I be here? I'd be on my way—wouldn't I?"

That last sharp question, barked at her, did what patient argument would probably have failed to do. It drove through to her reasoning mind.

Jerry could see the sudden intelligence in her eyes. She stared at him for a long moment, silent; and then gradually the automatic in her hand began to quiver as she trembled.

One more dry sob escaped her, the last he was to hear that night. She swallowed, and then, "If you didn't kill Dave, who did?" she whimpered.

"I don't know who killed him," Jerry said slowly. "I found him this way. The Japanese boy is dead too. Does he belong here?"

She nodded. "Togo—Dave's man."

"What happened?"

She fought for control and somehow got it. "Dave met me here," she said through stiff lips. "We talked for a little, and then I started out to my car for my purse. On the front porch someone caught me, put a handkerchief with chloroform over my nose and mouth. I heard them open the front door and go in. A moment later a shot. And then—and then the chloroform got me. I didn't know whether Dave had fired that shot or been hit by it. I came to in the next room. I was sick, weak. I suppose," she confessed dully, "I fainted before the chloroform put me out entirely. The radio was playing loudly. It had not been on before. I heard it turned off. I knew then they had gotten Dave. He would have been with me if he had been all right. I got this gun and found you standing over Dave. What are you doing here? How did you get here?"

"I asked a few questions and connected you with Dave Manners. He left the Harlequin Club a short while ago. I remembered he had a house. It seemed obvious you two were here."

"Who are you?"

"Doesn't matter, does it?"

"Dave said only one man in the city answered your description and would be after Stanley's money. Jerry Prince."

"Check," said Jerry. "And now that we know each other, take my word for it I didn't kill Stanley. It was suicide. What were you doing in this room?"

She stared at him silently. Without warning she began to laugh, high-pitched, mirthless laughter. "I went to Stanley's room to see when I was to leave the country with him."

JERRY frowned, looked down involuntarily at all that was left of Dave Manners, whom she had obviously loved. Her laugh broke off abruptly. "I was Dave's wife. I met Stanley at the Harlequin Club. He fell for me, got drunk, talked. It seemed a shame to let so much easy money leave the country."

"Leave the country?"

"Stanley had it all planned. He was financing a Central American revolution, putting up money for guns and a chartered boat. The men he was backing promised him he would be the fair-haired boy down there, and need never worry about the United States extraditing him for anything. He fell for it."

"Revolution," Jerry said slowly. "Are you sure about that?"

"Didn't Stanley tell me everything when he thought I was going with him?" she said scornfully.

"Who was he backing?"

"A greasy little ex-dictator called Doctor Juan José Alvarado who put over one revolution about fifteen years ago, lasted six months, was kicked out, and is ready

for another try. It seems the country's ripe for it. There is a General Porthos y Lopez in on it too. They have rounded up a bunch of exiles, chartered a little tramp steamer and are getting ready for the blow-off. But the man," said Daisy Dulane, "who roped Stanley into it is named Dennis O'Malley."

"The devil!" Jerry exclaimed. "I've heard of O'Malley. He's fought all over Central America."

Daisy Dulane nodded. "That's the man. And he travels with a little machine-gunner whom Stanley called Brisky. Stanley was helping to finance them all. And now he's dead, and Dave is dead, and the money is gone."

"You say there was more than one here tonight?"

"Yes. I thought at first it was Babe Regan with his men."

"Dave Manners' partner?"

Daisy Dulane laughed ironically, still under the stress of taut emotion. "They were partners but it didn't mean anything. Babe Regan wanted Dave's place. He wanted me too, until I made Dave see it. They had a terrible quarrel over that. The Babe convinced Dave it was all a mistake. But he's hated me ever since."

"Did he know the money was here tonight?"

"I don't think so, but he knew we were after it. He wanted to be cut in on it. Dave told him this was our own play."

"He knows something," Jerry told her. "He had me followed out of the Harlequin Club a little while ago. He lied to me about Manners."

"Dave didn't tell him anything. I know that. But if he heard Stanley was dead, and a woman was connected with it, he could guess the rest. But," said Daisy Dulane, "if Babe Regan was at the Harlequin Club before you came here, he couldn't have done this."

"He might have had time to get back,"

Jerry mused. "You don't know how long you were out?"

"No," she admitted.

"He's smooth and he's dangerous," Jerry said.

"I hate him more than any man alive!" Daisy Dulane said bitterly. "And if he killed Dave, I'll kill him if it's the last thing I do in this life!"

"I don't think he did it," Jerry said suddenly. "If he had the money, he wouldn't bother much about me. Why should he? I'm not crossing his game any other way."

And Daisy Dulane nodded. "I think you're right. If Babe Regan had that money and knew Dave was dead he wouldn't have anything to worry about."

"Then," said Jerry, "that leaves Dennis O'Malley and his friends. They're probably the only others in town who knew anything about the money. They would be the only ones to follow it so quickly. Did O'Malley know you were hooked up with Dave Manners?"

SHE frowned. "I don't know," she confessed. "I've seen Dennis O'Malley and Brisky at the Harlequin Club. They knew I was a regular there. How much else, I don't know. They never told Stanley anything. He would have passed it on to me right away."

"Did Dennis O'Malley ever say anything to you that would indicate he suspected you?"

"We never spoke," she shrugged. "But I've caught that big red-headed mug looking at me as if he'd throw me to the sharks with a smile. He didn't like me. I think he was afraid I was chiseling in on Stanley's money."

Jerry grinned faintly. "And of course you weren't."

"Sure I was!" she flashed. "Just like you. Stanley was a sucker who stole it from a lot of other suckers. He would

have lost it quickly enough anyway."

"Did it ever occur to you that the people who lost the money might be entitled to it again?"

"No. And it didn't occur to you either," she retorted quickly. "I've got your number from Dave."

"I doubt if he knew much to tell," Jerry sighed. He stepped back. "I'm going now. I suggest you get away from the house and let the police find Dave Manners. It may save you some awkward questions."

"Where are you going?"

Jerry smiled, said nothing.

"You're going after Dennis O'Malley," she charged. "Still after that money."

He shrugged.

"Then I'm going with you."

"No," Jerry refused. "I've had enough of you—"

And the next instant he dodged aside, snapping: "*Put that down!*"

For Daisy Dulane's face had suddenly blazed bitter and watchful. The gun in her hand had whipped up and was pointing directly at him. She was going to shoot. He read it in her face; he knew it.

And she shot, directly at him it seemed; one crashing report that shattered the quiet about them.

That shot was so close that tiny particles of burnt powder stung Jerry's face. The biting fumes of hot powder gasses struck his nostrils. And then it seemed to Jerry that everything went mad unexplainable; for behind him as it happened, a second shot roared out. He felt a jerk, a cold numbing pain in his left arm as he pitched sideways.

And Daisy Dulane shot a second time. All that in a brace of mad seconds.

She was across Dave Manners' body. She was beside him, pumping another shot from her gun. But not at him. She fired past, beyond. . . .

Jerry caught her arm. He knew only that he had been wounded. "What the devil is it? Are you crazy?" he demanded roughly, shaking her. One look showed a hole drilled through his left coat sleeve above the elbow. The numbness passed as quickly as it had come. Hot pain crawled up his arm nerves. The slow trickle of warm blood started on his skin.

"The window!" Daisy Dulane flung at him. She gestured with the automatic.

And Jerry realized as he spun about that she had not been shooting at him at all. She could not have missed at that distance. She had fired past him at something else. He had not been mistaken about that shot behind him. But the window beyond the radio at which she pointed, the window that was up some inches from the bottom, was no different than it had been when he entered the room. The curtain was still down, swaying gently in the breeze. No one was there. Nothing.

"I saw a gun shove through!" Daisy Dulane panted. "It was pointing at your back! I—I shot at it."

And there through the window shade were the two holes the bullets had made.

"Get over against the wall!" Jerry snapped at her.

Without waiting to see whether she obeyed he ran for the front hall, lunged out onto the big, glassed-in front porch.

ENOUGH light came from the house to show that the porch was deserted. Jerry jerked the porch door open, dashed down the front steps and around to the side of the house, his automatic ready.

But the gun was useless. There was no one there by the side of the house. Enough light came from the street to show in silhouette anyone running across the lawn. Jerry strode toward the back of the house, using his flashlight recklessly at dark shadows by the shrubbery

and trees. Still he saw no one. And before he reached the back of the house the whir of a starter beyond the street intersection, followed by the sound of a racing motor, stopped him and drew his attention that way. He heard the crescendo of the gears as the machine departed swiftly; but it was across Burlingame Drive on the side street. He could not see it. It was gone by the time Jerry got to the front porch.

Lights flashed on in a house across the street. Back on the side street near his parked car he heard a window slide up. Those crashing shots had been heard all over the neighborhood. There would be a quick investigation. Jerry went into the house almost as swiftly as he had left it.

Daisy Dulane was in the front hall, strained, tense, gun ready in her hand. "Did you find anything?" she asked. "Did—did I kill him?"

"There was no one out there."

"Oh—I'm glad. There's blood on your sleeve. Are you hurt badly?"

"Nothing that can't be taken care of later. Let's get out of here. Those shots were heard. Before we know it we'll be under arrest for killing Dave Manners and his boy."

She clicked to it instantly. "Dave picked me up in his car and brought me here. The keys are in his pocket. I'll—I'll have to get them."

"Anything of yours in his car?"

"My purse."

"Leave his automobile there. Mine's around on the side. Black coupe. Run!"

She went without further argument. Jerry lingered briefly. With his handkerchief he rubbed the metal of the light switch he had touched; did the same to the front door knob, and that of the porch door. Certain that no marks of betrayal were in the house, he left that front porch, cut across the side yard, and

slipped behind the wheel of the long black coupe. Daisy Dulane joined him there a few moments later, breathing hard from her haste. Jerry drove off swiftly.

Daisy Dulane was tense beside him, as a harsh voice came suddenly from under the dash. "Calling Car Number Seven—Calling Car Number Seven. Go to the corner of Burlingame Drive and Twenty-ninth Street. The residence of David Manners. Shots and suspicious turning on and off of lights reported by neighbors. . . . Calling Car Number Seven—Calling Car Number Seven. Go to—"

Jerry reached under the dash and shut off the radio. "I was looking for something like that," he said grimly. Then he swore softly under his breath.

"What is it?" his companion asked.

"I forgot that packet of twenty-dollar bills. It may be they can be traced back to Stanley, linking that up with Manners."

"I doubt it," Daisy Dulane asserted. "Stanley told me he used every precaution to make sure no one could trace the money he was carrying."

"Good. That will be some slight help." Jerry reached forward and turned on the radio again. For a couple of minutes there was nothing. Then—

"Calling all cars—calling all cars. Stop any automobile driving at suspicious speed and question the occupants. Double murder at the house of David Manners. Parties responsible drove automobile from neighborhood at high speed. Direction unknown. Examine all—"

Jerry shut off the radio again and reduced their speed. "They work fast these days," he remarked briefly.

"What are you going to do?" Daisy Dulane questioned uncertainly.

"Get this car out of sight as soon as possible, if we can make it without being gathered in. This section is clear anyway. The patrol car's at Manners' house."

CHAPTER SIX

Tailed

DRIVING at that slow, sedate pace, they threaded a way through the dark streets. Now and then other automobiles passed them, all driving at higher speed. Jerry chuckled as the third one rushed by. "Quite a few good citizens in a hurry to get home to bed tonight will get the shock of the evening when they're stopped and questioned."

Not two blocks further on Jerry's hand clamped tight on the steering wheel. A small touring car with two men in the front seat swung out of an intersection just ahead of them and turned the way they were going.

He heard her sharp indrawn breath. "That's a patrol car, isn't it?"

"It is," said Jerry. "Sit tight."

He drove on at the same sedate pace, neither increasing nor slacking it. The patrol car slowed down. Jerry blew the horn, swung out to pass it. Slowly they crawled alongside.

The two officers in the front seat peered into the black coupe intently. Jerry didn't even look at them. His companion, sitting very still, glanced out idly for a moment and then looked ahead again, unconcerned, uninterested in those blue uniforms. The black coupe drew ahead; and the patrol car swung in behind them. For two blocks the glare of its headlights followed; then the patrol car turned north into a side street and was gone.

Jerry heaved a big sigh of relief. "That was close," he commented. "They were looking for trouble."

The strain had told on her. Her voice was slightly unsteady again. "Do you think they're through with us?"

"Looks that way. I'll get off this street and see if they turn up again."

Jerry did that. The patrol car did not

reappear. And after a tortuous course which put three more miles on the speedometer, Jerry turned leisurely into an all-night garage. The lanky attendant stepped forward, grinning.

"Howdy," said Jerry, opening a door and getting out. "Gas this one up, Charlie. Get my other car out. I want it."

Charlie took an elevator to regions somewhere above. They could hear him maneuvering a car onto the elevator. He came down in a few moments with it. Another coupe, this; a light, cheap model, gray in color.

They got in, drove out in silence. Daisy Dulane spoke first. "You're like a magician. You pull things out of hats. How many cars have you around town?"

Jerry grinned. "This happens to be the last one. I change cars rather often. Nothing like having an extra or two. When you need one, you need it bad."

"What," asked Daisy Dulane sharply, "are you going to do now?"

"I'm going to find this Dennis O'Malley and see what he has to say."

"Stanley told me once that Dennis O'Malley was staying at the Capitan Hotel. And what about your arm? You haven't done anything for it yet."

"I think the bleeding's stopped. The wound can't be very deep. I can use it all right and it doesn't hurt much. Don't want to waste time with it now. We'll go to the Capitan and see what we turn up."

THE Capitan Hotel was on Central Avenue not far from the point where that main artery met the waterfront and the bay. It was a medium-sized, medium-priced hostelry catering to the men off the boats, transient passengers and the general life of the water front. Jerry stopped openly in front, went into the dimmed lobby. Several guests were sitting in the chairs, smoking, reading. They glanced at him, paid no further attention.

The clerk was busy with some records in the cashier's cage at the end of the desk. He came out, looked inquiringly at Jerry.

"Is Dennis O'Malley registered here?" Jerry questioned.

The clerk shook his head. "Mr. O'Malley checked out several days ago."

"He left a forwarding address, I suppose?"

The clerk sighed. "Just a minute, please." He stepped back into the cashier's cage, consulted a card file. Returning, he said: "Mr. O'Malley's mail is to be forwarded to the steamer *Rampa* at the Seventy-seventh Street dock."

"Thanks," said Jerry and turned away.

Just outside the door a deep voice said cheerfully: "Jerry, you'll be the death of me yet. I thought you was home in bed sound asleep—with the telephone plugged."

The speaker was Detective Sergeant Pincus Smith, looming there on the sidewalk beside the hotel entrance, his vast pink cheeks, childlike and innocent.

Jerry stopped short. His smile was a trifle forced. "I can think of no one I'd like to see less," Jerry said honestly. "You ruin my night, Sergeant."

Sergeant Smith pushed up the sagging brim of his ancient hat and beamed. "Flatterer! If I didn't know you, Jerry, I'd think you meant that. I've got a quarrel to pick with you, Jerry."

"Pick it."

"You're running wild tonight," Sergeant Smith said solicitously. "You feeling feverish, or something like that, Jerry? Or mebbe you been drinkin' too much. You've got a taxi driver ticking off a meter out in front of your apartment building."

"I see you've been watching me, Sergeant. Naughty, naughty! A great big grown man like you running around playing peeping tom!"

Sergeant Smith's vast reddish jowls drooped. "Now, Jerry, that ain't no way to talk to me. I just happened to be driving by with you on my mind, Jerry. I was thinking about your damaged car, an' feeling sorry for you. I saw the lights on in your apartment and the hacker waitin' out in front. I figured you might be going out, so I asked him if he was waiting for you. He said yes. And," Sergeant Smith confessed dolefully, "I waited some too. And I bet you weren't up there all the time, Jerry."

"No," said Jerry. "I went out the back way. Forgot all about that taxi driver, Sergeant. My memory's poor."

SERGEANT SMITH nodded agreeably. "I've noticed that before, Jerry. I'll bet you can't even remember where you got that car there at the curb."

"Who said it was my car, Sergeant?"

"Mebbe it belongs to the young lady, Jerry. Only why ain't she driving it? You could 'a' knocked me over with a feather when I saw you two rolling down Central Avenue a few minutes ago. 'That can't be Jerry,' I says to myself. 'He's home in bed asleep. The telephone's plugged. He told me so himself.' I said to the boys over there in the car, 'I'm calling myself a liar, boys, an' it hurts; so let's follow that little gray coop an' settle it.' An' we followed it," Sergeant Smith sighed. "An' darn if it wasn't you, after all, Jerry. It just goes to show when you go to bed early at night there's no tellin' what you'll get up with. Who's the young lady, Jerry?"

"You wouldn't be interested, Sergeant. It's a delicate matter. Er . . ."

Sergeant Smith's big childlike face managed to look shocked. "Jerry, you aren't philandering at this time of night? Was that what you went in the hotel for?"

"You've got a nasty mind, Sergeant. My friend — er — Miss Skolinsky — thought she had left her purse in the lobby earlier this evening. I just dashed in to inquire about it."

Sergeant Smith beamed again and thrust two fat thumbs under the belt encircling his vast expanse of middle. "Lochinvar," said Sergeant Smith admiringly to the night about them. "Sir Walter Raleigh, and all that. Jerry Prince, the ladies' delight. It isn't every girl can get her young man to run errands for her at this time of night, Jerry."

"No," Jerry sighed, "and it isn't every man who finds you back of his shoulder every time he turns around, Sergeant. You're getting to be a disease."

"You will have your little joke," Sergeant Smith chuckled. "Got your gun with you this time, Jerry?"

"I have," said Jerry, moving quickly from Sergeant Smith's outthrust hand. "Don't bother to frisk me for it. I have the permit too."

"I'll bet you have, Jerry. A nice respectable young man like you wouldn't go out with a gun unless he carried a permit to show to the first copper who asked questions. But why a rod now, Jerry?"

"I got worried, Sergeant. Stick-ups, and all that, due to the inefficiency of the police."

"My, my," Sergeant Smith marveled. "I didn't know about all that. You're a voter and one of our leading citizens, Jerry. I take a great interest in you. I'm going to see that you're protected the rest will escort you home. You can feel perfectly safe."

"I'm not going home, Sergeant."

"Where are you going, Jerry?"

"I'm going to take the young lady home."

"I knew you'd get ashamed of yourself,

Jerry. That's the place for her. Introduce me."

"She doesn't like ham coppers."

Sergeant Smith shook his head lugubriously. "You'll be the death of me yet, Jerry. I'm gettin' too old to stay up all hours of the night with my rheumatism an' be talked to like this. Where did you say you were going from here, Jerry?"

"I didn't say," Jerry replied succinctly. "Am I to understand you're going to follow me?"

SERGEANT SMITH pushed his hat forward over his forehead. "You got it wrong, Jerry," he mourned. "We're going to protect you. You might do something with that gun you'll be sorry for. So we're going to stay right behind you an' see you tucked safe in bed. You make me nervous, Jerry, running around town this late at night."

"You're getting in my hair, Sergeant."

"Now, Jerry . . ."

Jerry grinned. "I was just ragging you, Sergeant. Don't take it seriously. If we're going for a ride, let's go." He turned to the gray coupe.

"That was a copper," Daisy Dulane said as they drove off. Her voice was strained, jerky.

"It was," Jerry nodded. "That was Sergeant Smith. He looks like a big fat numbskull—and he can outthink anything they've got on the force. He's dangerous."

"And he's after us?"

A glance in the rear-view mirror, and Jerry said: "Not only after us, with us. He's following us in a patrol car. I bumped into him earlier in the evening, thought I'd outsmarted him. He should be home in bed now. He's stirring around tonight with more than half an eye on the Stanley case. I think he suspects I have

something to do with it. He spotted us driving down Central Avenue, tailed us to the hotel in the patrol car, and now he's sticking with us."

"If he suspects you, why doesn't he arrest you?"

Jerry grinned. "Because he doesn't know anything he could make stick. He knew it was no use trying to tail me under cover, so he's doing it in the open. He suspects we're up to something and he's going to horn in on it."

"If we could have left him back there. . . ."

"I didn't want to," Jerry told her. "He would have gone in the hotel and found out from the clerk that I was asking for Dennis O'Malley. He would have gotten O'Malley's address and been there with us, or ahead of us."

"You sound like you still intend to see O'Malley tonight."

"I do."

"I don't see how," she declared flatly.

Jerry chuckled. "Does seem kind of complicated, doesn't it, with Sergeant Smith glued on behind."

She looked out the back window. Her face was drawn, her voice troubled. "We might as well give it up."

"You watch," said Jerry cheerfully.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Death Ship

TEN minutes—a quarter of an hour passed while Jerry drove the small coupe in a leisurely, tortuous course through the city streets. At no time did he even approach the speed limit. The headlights of the patrol stayed never more than a hundred and fifty yards behind. Daisy Dulane made one more attempt to find out what was in Jerry's mind, and failing, fell silent.

Twice Jerry drove by the freight yards near the bay. The streets were dark and shadowy down here, the houses mean and squalid. Jerry began to whistle softly through his teeth as he cruised back and forth through the neighborhood. Now and then they could hear the whistles in the yards. Jerry finally quitted that locality and began to drive as if heading for a certain destination.

Within a few minutes the street they were following ran into a highway heading out of town. It paralleled the railroad tracks. Just ahead of them were the winking red and green caboose lights of a freight train that had just pulled out of the yards. A full half-mile ahead of those caboose lights they could see the brighter glow of the locomotive headlight.

Daisy Dulane stirred in the seat beside Jerry. "Are you going to drive out in the country?" she demanded. "This is the highway south."

Jerry chuckled, "We won't go far."

"I can't see what you're up to," she complained.

"You will," Jerry assured her.

They were still inside the city limits; they would be no safer outside. The city police who manned the patrol car carried deputy sheriffs' commissions for the entire county. They could be followed and dealt with for many miles yet.

Jerry began to drive faster. They crawled up on the freight train, passed the caboose and left car after car behind. And still Jerry drove faster.

Daisy Dulane looked behind once more. "They're keeping up with us," she stated hopelessly.

"You can't beat Sergeant Smith," Jerry admitted.

Houses began to thin out as they caught up with the head of the long, lum-

bering train, which was picking up speed slowly.

They drew parallel with the engine, drew on ahead. The tracks were not more than fifty feet away. The glaring headlight of the gigantic freight locomotive lighted the tracks and the ribbon of cement over which they were speeding. The white painted danger signs of a road crossing stood out in stark silhouette an eighth of a mile ahead. They could see the red danger signal swinging back and forth. As they drew near to it they could hear the clangor of the automatic warning bell.

They came to the cross roads. . . .

And Jerry slammed on the brakes suddenly, cutting their swift pace instantly. He wrenched on the steering wheel, made the car turn on two whels, dropped into second gear, pressed the accelerator down hard. They leaped forward in gear for the railroad tracks.

The crossing was bathed in dazzling light. The onrushing locomotive was less than a hundred yards away, coming fast when they made that turn. The whistle began to shriek wild warning. Heedless of the danger, Jerry kept going. The locomotive and their car seemed to be converging on the same spot at the same instant. Daisy Dulane cried out in involuntary fear, caught the door handle as if to open it and leap out.

"Sit still!" Jerry yelled at her.

Frozen, she poised there on the edge of the seat, her eyes staring past him out the open door window at that monster of steam and steel rushing inexorably at them.

TIME seemed to stand still. Their automobile seemed to have lost its momentum, to be slowly crawling. Their front wheels passed over the tracks. They were suddenly square ahead of the engine; and the engine was not more than

a hundred feet away. It towered high above them. They could see the spurting steam from the piston packing, the red sparks shooting high from the squat stack; and the dazzling silver headlight beam laced the night overhead like a giant arm reaching out to hold and crush. The violent blasts of the whistle were deafening in their ears. The crossing under them was shaking, and they could feel it.

Jerry's foot jammed the accelerator hard against the floor boards. For one awful moment he knew sick doubt. It seemed they could not possibly get across it in time; that in the space of the next breath the terrible crash would come. And then they were suddenly off the tracks and the great engine roared behind them so close it seemed to brush their rear tires. The shrieking whistle fell silent. The steady rumble of the freight cars over the crossing became the dominant sound.

Jerry shifted into high once more, carefully lifted his hands from the steering wheel and drew a deep breath. "I thought for a moment we weren't going to make it," he admitted.

She sank slowly back on the seat. "You're a fool!" she said shakily.

"I know," Jerry admitted cheerfully. "I wonder what Sergeant Smith thinks about it. He'll have five or ten minutes to decide while he's waiting on the other side of the crossing. It's the only way we could lose him. Now we'll go places and do things."

They were not beyond the range of the city street system yet. Driving full speed, they entered a network of dirt and macadam roads. Twisting, turning, driving at high speed, Jerry put the crossing far behind and out of sight before that long, slowly lumbering freight train could possibly have dragged its caboose past the crossing.

And Jerry cut through toward the south shore of the bay.

The city lay in a cup around the west end of the bay. The Seventy-seventh Street dock was on the south shore, far out. Years before a grain-exporting company had run a fill through the marshy land out there and erected great concrete elevators. They had dredged the dock basin alongside the elevators. Igniting grain dust had blown the huge ferro-concrete grain towers into a mass of twisted wreckage. They had not been rebuilt.

The dock was still there, far from the rest of the harbor facilities. It was seldom used. A weed-bordered macadam road sided by rusty railroad tracks crossed the quarter of a mile of low, swampy ground to it. Jerry turned into that road with his car lights out.

Faint moonlight showed the way. Jerry drove with his engine throttled slow and silent. Weeds and cattails grew in rank profusion beside the causeway. The spot was lonely, uninhabited, desolate.

The guant, fire-blackened wreckage of the grain towers loomed starkly before them. In the moonlight they could see the dock basin, the ship warped alongside the concrete mole. It showed no lights.

Jerry stopped the car in the black shadows by the end of the ruined grain towers. He got out. Daisy Dulane joined him at the front of the car.

"Stay here," Jerry told her.

"I'd rather be with you. This place gives me the creeps."

Small wonder, Jerry thought. Dank air from the lower bay, smelling of fish and salt, stirred about them. Their feet scraped faintly on the concrete as they threaded a cautious way around piles of wreckage along the dock.

THE ship was tied at the further end. What was left of the grain towers piled up at their left to a jagged, uneven rim, sharp against the night sky. They slipped through shadows by the base of the grain towers. Beyond the dock the bay

surface glistened restlessly under the moonlight. The ship's superstructure, funnel and cargo masts limned darkly against the sky. Beyond, far beyond, across the bay, the lights of the city winked and glittered around the west shore.

It was a ratty little steamer, barely big enough for deep-sea work. Leprous patches of rust showed plain as they came abreast of it. A gangplank slanted steeply up to the midships deck. Still no light had appeared. The gangway was deserted, and the deck rail above it.

They halted opposite the gangway. She whispered: "Where is everyone?"

"I'm going aboard and see. Wait here."

Jerry stepped into the moonlight flooding the concrete mole. She followed at his side stubbornly. And at the foot of the gangplank her fingers closed convulsively on his arm.

"Look at that!" she whimpered.

Jerry saw it at the same moment. From the shadows under the gangway a pair of legs thrust out into the moonlight. Jerry's companion pressed close to him, clutching his arm.

Jerry took her hand from his arm, caught the feet, moved the body out. It came face down, arms dragging limply behind the head. And Jerry, forewarned as he was, felt his pulses hammer faster as he saw the knife haft driven below the left shoulder blade.

This man had died without warning.

"Go back to the car and wait for me," Jerry ordered under his breath.

"What — what are you going to do?"

Never mind. Get out of here! This is no place for a woman!"

She went. Gun in hand, Jerry stepped on the gangplank and moved cautiously up the steep, cleated rise to the ship's deck.

This small tramp had no well deck forward and aft. From bow to stern there was one main deck. And on that starboard

side where Jerry stood not a soul was in sight. Faint wisps of smoke were coming from the funnel. Now and then the utter silence was punctuated by the muted clank of a pump below deck somewhere. But that was all.

And then a door opened abruptly up forward.

Jerry barely had time to flatten himself beside a dark porthole. A man stepped out, closed the door, came forward several steps and crossed over to the other side of the ship, forward of the superstructure. Jerry guessed he had come out of the saloon. It should be there under the bridge.

The man had not looked aft. There had not been enough light to tell anything about him. Jerry slipped after him three steps and came abreast of a dark, yawning doorway. He could see through to the other side of the ship in the moonlight beyond. Hot air mixed with coal gasses met him as he stepped inside. This was the fire room, and by walking across the steel gratings he could reach the other side where that man had gone.

IT WAS pitch black in the fire-room fiddley. Guided only by the moonlight visible through the open door opposite Jerry felt his way across it.

The murmur of voices on the port deck met him as he advanced. Two men were talking there in ordinary tones; but only one was understandable.

"No luck so far. I never seen such a guy in my life. He's a tough egg."

Moving with half his mind on that speech, Jerry was almost to the doorway. He'd wait there a minute and listen further, he decided. There were men aboard the ship after all; men up to something out of the ordinary. And then, with no warning whatever as the voice started to speak again a deep, sepulchral groan came from the blackness just at Jerry's feet.

He stopped short, fighting an impulse to leap back. Nothing followed that groan. Straining his eyes, Jerry seemed to make out a darker blotch there on the steel gratings. His hand streaked for his tiny pocket flash. The beam flicked for an instant.

It looked like an apparition. Something seen in a nightmare. A man was huddled there at his feet. A black, crimson splashed caricature of a face leaped into vivid relief as the light struck it. The eyes were closed. The slack-lipped mouth was working feebly. Jerry kept the light for another moment, heedless of who might see it. The man wore dirty overall trousers and sleeveless shirt. His close-cropped head was bare. The blood that streaked his face came from a great gash in the middle of his forehead. He was, Jerry saw when all that registered, a man out of the fire room down below, black with coal dust. He had been struck down by a terrible blow and left to lie here.

Whoever had done this must have also left the corpse at the foot of the gangplank. Jerry wondered if the men talking out on deck knew it. He slipped the flash in his pocket, tightened his grip on the automatic. And in that moment, down at the shore end of the dock a woman's shrill scream of fright burst out, instantly stopped.

The louder voice out on deck broke off. Running steps pounded along the deck toward the bow. Jerry himself whirled back toward the gangway. Daisy Dulane had screamed back by the car. Jerry swore at himself for bringing a woman along on business like this. She had been bad luck from the first moment he laid eyes on her.

Bad luck! He learned the worst almost instantly. He was halfway across the fiddley when he tripped unexpectedly, going down full length. He struck the steel grating hard, his hands breaking the fall. The automatic flew from his fin-

gers. He heard it fall to the fire room far below, bouncing, clattering against steel ladders as it went. It exploded deafeningly in midair as some projection caught the trigger. Jerry, weaponless, tried to scramble up, for he knew more was to come. But a leg had been out-thrust from the blackness to trip him.

He was up at arm's length when the weight of a charging body struck his back, driving him down again. Jerry twisted as he fell, trying to get his hands on the unknown. He did get his fingers on a coat. His other hand swinging around came hard against the side of a head. A hand buried in his hair at the same instant. It shoved his head down, held it there — and in the blackness a stunning blow struck him above the ear.

Jerry's strength left him. Sick, half unconscious, he struggled feebly. But he was still able to recognize the feel of a gun muzzle pressing against his neck. He heard, as if far away, yet distinct, "Pipe down, mug, before I turn on the heat!"

Jerry stopped struggling. There were two of them. They jerked him to his feet, half supporting him, and hauled him over the unconscious figure and out on the port deck. And Jerry knew that he had been within an eyelash of joining that stricken fireman. His head felt as if it had been split. He was still weak. Things were whirling. But the dank salt air out on deck cleared his head fast.

A figure came clambering up a Jacob's ladder and vaulted over the rail as Jerry was hustled forward. "Who fired that rod?" it asked excitedly.

"This guy dropped his rod."

"Who is he?" the other asked.

And the man at Jerry's right grunted: "He's a sucker who picked himself a bunch of trouble. Better go back to that boat. We won't need you."

They took him under the bridge wing, opened a door, thrust him into bright

light. And as one of them slammed the door behind, the other pushed Jerry forward, keeping a gun in his back.

"This the guy you're looking for?" he asked.

Jerry stopped there by the long saloon table, staring through a thin blue haze of cigarette smoke at the assembled company. But it was on the man nearest him, who turned and faced him, smiling thinly, that his attention rested in those first moments.

Blond, slender and handsome, Babe Regan raised pale, tapering fingers in a gesture of greeting. His gentle drawling voice greeted: "Hello, Prince. I've been expecting you. This makes the evening perfect."

CHAPTER EIGHT

Horror Aboard

THERE were eight of them in that saloon. Four were sitting in chairs along one side of the table. One was standing near the door at the other end. One was standing behind the men in the chairs. Another was across the table from them. And Babe Regan, still in his immaculate dinner coat, was standing by the end man of the four seated ones.

Sheer astonishment kept Jerry speechless for a moment. Babe Regan here! It was the last thing he had expected to see.

The answer flashed to him a second later. Babe Regan had been expecting him. Only one person in all the world beside Daisy Dulane and himself knew that they had been coming here at this time. That was the man who had been standing outside the open window of Dave Manners' living room; the man who had shot through at Jerry's back.

"So you are the one who tried to pop me," Jerry said slowly.

Babe Regan's pale, tapering fingers lifted a cork-tipped cigarette to his lips. He inhaled, trickled the smoke from a corner of his mouth deliberately. His gentle,

drawing voice might have been welcoming a guest at the Harlequin Club.

"Bad shock, wasn't it?" he said cheerfully. "Daisy surprised me. I couldn't see her very well. Another inch or two and she'd have planted me with the flowers under the window."

"Too bad she didn't get you between the eyes," Jerry said fervently.

Babe Regan raised his cigarette to his lips again. The fingers of his other hand played with a coat button in the old, familiar gesture. "I see you don't like me," he murmured. "I seem to be unpopular with everyone I meet tonight. But then life has its compensations. I'm looking for my compensation now. Eh, O'Malley?"

Babe Regan half turned as he spoke, exposing the man seated behind him. And Jerry saw what he had not noticed in the first surprise of facing Babe Regan.

The four men seated side by side at the table were all tied in their chairs. The one at the end, by Babe Regan, had cords around his bull chest and the chair back. His arms were under those ropes too, and his thick wrists were tied across one another in his lap. His legs were fastened to the chair legs.

The other four were secured the same way.

The fourth one at the far end was big and husky too, albeit a trifle fat; but his cheeks were dark-hued, and a fierce black mustache curled belligerently at the corners of his mouth.

Next to him was a short, thick-set, oily skinned man with a close-cropped black mustache. He was dark-skinned too.

The third man seemed like a child as he huddled there in the seat. He was thin to the point of emaciation. His face was sharp, ferretlike, and his thin nose humped in the middle and grew sharp at the end. His eyes, small and dark,

seemed never still, darting here and there about the room.

Jerry had never seen them before but he knew them. That man at the end would be General Porthos y Lopez, of whom Daisy Dulane had spoken. And next to him Doctor Juan José Alvarado, ex-dictator, willing to be another. The little man was Brisky, Dennis O'Malley's sidekick and machine gunner. The big, red-headed, bull-chested man by Babe Regan was Dennis O'Malley, soldier-of-fortune, filibusterer.

DENNIS O'MALLEY'S hair was a flaming red. His eyes were blue, icy blue through the swirling cigarette smoke. He was deeply tanned, almost as dark as the Central Americans beyond him. His chin was square; lumps of muscles rippled above his jaw. From him leaped bold courage and power.

But it was not Dennis O'Malley's face or personality that held Jerry's gaze after he had scanned the others. Dennis O'Malley's cheek—the one next to Babe Regan—was scarred from the eye down under the ear with numerous red, angry burns. Fresh burns, rather horrible to look at. Babe Regan's soft, feminine fingers raised his cigarette to his lips once more—and Jerry knew where those burns had come from. That curly-headed killer had been standing there pressing the hot coal of his cigarette against Dennis O'Malley's face. This final episode of Stanley's dollars was torture.

Smiling, Babe Regan waited for O'Malley to answer his question.

And Dennis O'Malley, his face black with rage, strained against the ropes which held him in the chair. His voice rumbled out of his throat in a rasp of fury. "I told you what you could do, you lily-skinned rat! If I ever get my hands on your neck I'll snap it like a pipe stem! To hell with you and your

damned questions! I've met tougher guys than you!"

"I'll bet you have," Babe Regan drawled with amusement. "I'm not tough, O'Malley. I've got a kind heart; but I don't like stubbornness. Once more—where is that money of Stanley's?"

"Go to hell!"

Babe Regan drew deep on the cigarette until the coal at the end was red hot and glowing. Then casually he put it behind O'Malley's ear where the skin was tenderest, the nerves near the surface. O'Malley's jaw muscles ridged, rocklike. The chair creaked alarmingly as his mighty muscles strained at the cords which held him. But they did not give. The rank stench of burning flesh drifted out.

Jerry Prince, whose nerves were steel, who had moved through scenes of violence unperturbed, who had faced death with a grin, felt himself growing a little sick at this. He had heard of such things, but had never seen them.

And Dennis O'Malley suddenly seemed to go insane with pain and rage. His mighty bellow filled the saloon. "I'll kill you! Damn you, I'll tear your heart out with my bare hands!"

Babe Regan took the cigarette away and puffed the dying coal red and hot once more. His faint smile was almost wistful as he ignored O'Malley and spoke to Jerry. "They don't stay hot long enough," he said almost apologetically.

Jerry's two captors were standing close at his sides, guns touching him in the back. To them Babe Regan spoke. "Are you sure no one else came with them?"

And the man at Jerry's left answered. "The two of them's all we seen. They come up to the gangplank, found the guard lyin' there. The girl went back to the car. He came in the fire-room fiddley an' we grabbed him. The boys got the dame back at the car. We heard her yelp just before we grabbed this one."

"Good work," said Babe Regan negligently. He looked at O'Malley and murmured: "You're stubborn, my friend. I know the money's on this boat somewhere and we're going to get it."

"Try it!" Dennis O'Malley defied hoarsely. Babe Regan sauntered along behind the chairs. "How about it, General Lopez?" he inquired pleasantly. "Do you feel like talking now?"

The fierce-mustached one cringed in his chair. "*Dios y Maria!*" he cried out. "If I know, I tell you! The Señor O'Malley knows all!"

And Alvarado, whose plans encompassed the death of many innocent citizens, shrank too, and cast a hunted look over his shoulder. "Don', Señor!" he chattered. "I know not'ing too! O'Malley ees the man you must deal with! You could keel me and I know notheeng!"

"You yellow-bellied swine!" O'Malley snarled at them. "What if you don't know nothing? Don't crawl because of it!"

AT that moment the door across the room opened. Daisy Dulane stumbled in, followed by two men. She was hatless. Her immaculate blond permanent was badly mussed. Her face was pale, haunted. Stumbling to the end of the table, she stopped, staring at the scene before her. At sight of Babe Regan she uttered a low, whimpering sound.

Babe Regan smiled at her winningly. "If it isn't little Daisy! Quite a surprise to find you out here on the bay front at this time of night. You should be at home getting your beauty sleep, Daisy. You'll need your good looks from now on. The easy-money days are over."

Her face had gone paler, if possible, at sight of Jerry a guarded prisoner. Now as Babe Regan finished speaking she burst out passionately: "So it was you who killed him!"

Babe Regan smiled deprecatingly. "Killed who, Daisy?"

"You know who I mean. Dave."

"Is he dead?"

"You know it!"

"Too bad," Babe Regan murmured piously. "Heartbreaking. If I was you, Daisy, I'd get out of town. You haven't any friend to front for you now."

Her lip curled. "Tell those gorillas of yours to let me go then."

"I'm sorry," Babe Regan sighed. "It can't be done just now, Daisy. We're busy. Mr. O'Malley here is about to turn over Stanley's money to us. You'll appreciate that since you had it tonight yourself."

She looked bewildered. "What's he doing with it if you killed Dave?"

"Ah—that's just the question, Daisy. I didn't kill Dave. Our red-headed friend, Mr. O'Malley did so. It appears that when he heard Stanley was dead and a woman had been seen coming out of his room, O'Malley put two and two together and got you and Dave for an answer. He was at the Harlequin Club, watching Dave, when you telephoned. He and two of his gentle friends trussed you up and walked into the house. Dave tried to shoot it out but they got him first. And a moment after the shot was fired the Jap boy popped into the room and saw them. He tried to run. O'Malley, realizing the consequences if the boy got to the police, ran him down in the next room and stopped that. His methods are direct, to say the least."

Daisy Dulane rested the palms of her hands on the table edge and said slowly to Babe Regan: "But if he killed Dave and got the money what are you doing here?"

Babe Regan fingered the button on his coat. His smile was winning and gentle. "The same thing, Daisy. Dave and I were partners, but he tried to chisel me out of

this deal. I happened to be outside the door of his office when you telephoned him. I heard enough to be certain you had the money. I declared myself in on it. When Prince showed up, asking for Dave, I smelt a rat. I had him followed. He pushed my man in an ash can and got away. So I ran over to Dave's house to sit in the game myself. I walked up under the window and there you were, big as life, Daisy, talking to Prince. Was I flabbergasted?"

Babe Regan lifted his shoulders expressively, and waved one pale, slender hand.

"I was," he assured her. "And disappointed when I found the money was gone. You and Prince finally gave me an idea where to find it, Daisy. But since Mr. Prince seemed to be very persistent about the matter I thought it best to leave him there with Dave. Unfortunately"—and here Babe Regan smiled sadly—"you were a little too quick for me, Daisy. You almost put lead in my skull. I owe you something for that, my dear. I'll try to settle the account soon."

Daisy Dulane shivered at the gentle, drawing suggestion.

"And," Babe Regan finished, "since I missed Prince and didn't have time to wait and settle the matter there, I went on about my business. But in case you turned up here before we were through I had some of the boys watch for you. They had orders to let you come aboard before they collared you. And here we are," Babe Regan finished mildly. "There seems no doubt that Mr. O'Malley has the money here on the boat somewhere. Unfortunately he's hidden it too well for us to discover it, short of taking the boat to pieces. There isn't enough time for that. I am forced to persuade him to put it on the line."

"You'll have a beard down to your shoe tops before that happens!" Dennis O'Malley snarled.

Jerry asked: "Suppose you get it, what then?"

"Nothing," said Babe Regan modestly. "You're all in it. You won't dare squeal to the coppers. And if you do—what then?" He smiled at Jerry and Daisy Dulane. "It will be your word against mine. The coppers'll have to find the money."

JERRY shrugged. His head was clear by now. Strength was back in his muscles. But he was not at ease. He knew Babe's reputation. The Babe had participated in too much tonight to make it healthy to risk the police. It was possible he would decide witnesses were not desirable. O'Malley wouldn't talk. Murder hung over his head. The Babe hated Daisy Dulane too. He knew she hated him. She knew too much about his past affairs. Would he risk letting her go, possibly to the police? It was a toss-up that he wouldn't. And if he didn't, Jerry's own mouth would have to be shut too. Babe Regan would do it without a qualm if the mood struck him.

The Babe had seven men here in the saloon—the three who had been standing guard when Jerry entered, the two who had brought him in, and the two who had come with Daisy Dulane. There was a boat alongside with at least one man in it. Big odds; too big to offer any chance at all.

The two Latin Americans seemed to realize it. They slumped in their chairs, against the ropes holding them, and made no effort to hide their distress and fright.

But Brisky, Dennis O'Malley's ferret-faced little partner, sat bolt upright, silent as he had been since Jerry first entered the saloon. During all the conversation Brisky had just sat there, his beady eyes wandering from one face to the other. And there was something about his passive, watchful silence that reminded Jerry of a runner on the mark.

Dennis O'Malley bulked in his chair like an enraged bull, wounded, helpless, but defiant. His defiance did him no good, however.

Babe Regan looked at Jerry, looked at Daisy Dulane, considered a moment and then spoke curtly to the men who watched them. "Take them out of here. I'm too busy to bother with them any more just now." He added as an afterthought: "Don't throw 'em over the side—yet. Lock them in one of the cabins. You've got the keys."

Jerry and Daisy Dulane were hustled out, two men to each of them. They were taken to an inside companion passage with staterooms on one side. One of the doors was opened. They were shoved in. It was closed, locked. The men walked away.

Jerry and his companion stood in pitch blackness for a long moment. Jerry spoke first with a dry chuckle. "Well, you would come along."

She had settled into calm, icy certainty. "They're going to kill us," she said colorlessly.

"I shouldn't wonder," Jerry agreed.

"And there's nothing we can do about it. We're locked in here. They're watching outside. They took my gun. I'll bet you haven't anything to use for a weapon either."

"Check. Not a thing," Jerry agreed.

He took out his flash which had been left on him. The beam showed them to be in a small cramped sea cabin. Locker drawers had been pulled out, contents tumbled on the floor. Even the bed clothes had been jerked off and mattresses lifted for hasty examination.

Daisy Dulane went over to the bunk and sat down. Her voice suddenly sounded weary. "I miss Dave. He looked out for me. It—it burns me up to think of Babe Regan coming out with all Dave's worked for, and Stanley's money on top

of that. He'll freeze me out, of course. And there isn't a thing I can do about it."

Beyond the door, steps began to pace up and down the passage. "They've put a guard over us," Jerry murmured.

"What does it matter?" she said wearily. "We couldn't do anything anyway."

Jerry suddenly chuckled. "They only frisked me in a hurry to make sure I had no gun. They overlooked one thing. We're going right out of here."

"You talk like a cokie. Can you walk through a steel wall?"

"With these I can," said Jerry, and his hand came out of his pocket and the flash glinted on a bunch of keys. "I could get out of Sing Sing with these," Jerry chuckled.

CHAPTER NINE

Red Dollars

SHE didn't believe him, and said so flatly. Jerry paid no attention. He was looking about the small cabin with the flash, looking for a weapon. He found nothing suitable, shrugged, said: "Guess I can make it all right."

And he stepped to the door and began to try the keys. The lock was simple. The fourth key he selected did the trick. The door swung in half a foot. Jerry listened.

Their guard had been pacing up and down the passage. He was at the after end now. In a moment his steps turned back. Jerry closed the door noiselessly. The man came abreast, passed without inspecting the door. Jerry had kicked off his shoes as he waited. He went out the door in soundless stocking feet. Four swift steps brought him to the man's back. Jerry caught him around the throat, yanked him back off balance, tripped him and drove his head against the steel bulkhead at the left. The burden sank limply in his hands. It was as simple as that.

He dragged the fellow back to the cabin

door, across the threshold, and dropped him on the floor. Then he knelt beside the man and searched him. With a grunt of satisfaction he brought out an automatic. Slipping out the clip, he found it loaded.

Standing, gun in one hand, flashlight in the other, Jerry said: "I've got a chance now. I don't know whether you can get down the gangway or not without being seen. Better try it. If you make it, wait at the car for me."

"All right," she agreed doubtfully.

They left the cabin. Jerry locked the door. Just as they started along the passage, steps turned in at the end. A voice said: "Hey, Jack, where are you?"

"Here," Jerry replied gruffly.

"The Babe wants you in there. I'll take your place."

Jerry met him in the darkness, and when they were abreast he caught the man by the collar and jammed the gun in his side.

"Hey, what the devil!"

"Shut up!" said Jerry. "Or I'll let you have it! Your sidekick is in the cabin where you left us. How many more of you are out on deck?"

"None, mister. Don't get slippy with that gun. I'm standin' still, see? You don't have to worry about me. I know when I'm healthy."

"I'll bet you do," said Jerry. "Here, Daisy, frisk him while I hold him."

She did that, got a clasp knife and a gun. Jerry took them both. "I'll need them," he explained. "Wait a minute."

He took the second captive back, locked him in the cabin and rejoined her. Together they went to the cross companion where it gave access to the deck. They stepped out on the starboard deck. There a few feet away was the gangway. Jerry went to its head, listened there.

"Beat it!" he said.

"Aren't you coming?"

"No. I've got something else to do. Wait for me at the car."

She fled lightly down the gangway without further argument.

Jerry waited until she was safe on the mole and clear of the ship. He put on his shoes as he waited. Then he slipped forward, watching the doors as he passed. The galley, he judged, should be right back of the saloon.

The door he opened emitted a smell of stale cookery. It was dark inside, broken by one half moon of light in the bulkhead, separating the galley from the cabin. He had noticed that while he was in the cabin. Dishes were handed through there for the officers' table.

DENNIS O'MALLEY was roaring with pain and rage as Jerry stepped into the galley. The torture had evidently continued. Jerry's flashlight winked to a door that led into the saloon, put there probably for use in stormy weather. Satisfied it was there, he stepped out on deck again, closed the galley door behind him and calmly fired three shots over the rail.

While the reverberations were still echoing, he stepped back into the galley, closing the door once more.

Dennis O'Malley had stopped cursing now. Confusion reigned in the saloon, tramping feet, excited voices. Babe Regan's loud orders rose over the other sounds.

"On deck, all of you! These fellows are safe enough in here! It sounds like the coppers!"

They bolted out of the saloon in a body. Jerry could hear them tramping on the deck outside, silent now, watchful, wary.

Jerry opened the door and stepped into the saloon.

Babe Regan and his men were all on deck. Dennis O'Malley and his companions sat bolt upright in their chairs. Their faces showed a mixture of emotions at

sight of him. Dennis O'Malley swore: "I'll be damned! Where'd you come from? What's going on out there?"

Jerry went around to the back of those chairs in a swift rush, opening the clasp knife.

"Nobody out there," he said to Dennis O'Malley. "I fired in the air. Only way I could get in here to you." As Jerry spoke he slashed at the ropes which held the big bull-chested filibusterer.

Dennis O'Malley swore again, dawning hope and joy in his voice. "By God, I couldn't have done it better myself! You're a wonder! Brisky, look at this! He's cutting us loose! Oh, God, give me time to get my hands on that yellow-bellied son of hell!"

And as the last word left Dennis O'Malley's lips he surged out of the chair, a free man, shaking the cords to the floor.

Jerry passed him the extra gun, went on to Brisky.

And that little silent man who had sat poised and waiting spoke now in a husky whisper, taut with venomous anticipation. "Half a minute's all I want! I was cleanin' me pepper pot this afternoon! It's all ready!"

Doctor Alvarado cringed in his chair and begged: "Don' go wild, boys."

"Close your trap!" Brisky snarled at him. "We're runnin' this show now!" And as the last cord fell away from his ankles the little man came to his feet like a cat.

He staggered for a moment off balance and then whirled to the long red-plush locker seat that ran along the forward wall of the saloon. He jerked a section of it up, dived down in the receptacle underneath, came up cradling a shining, but well-worn submachine gun. It fitted into his hands with the perfection of long experience.

"Bring 'em on!" Brisky said harshly,

whirling around. He was fairly dancing with anticipation.

Dennis O'Malley's automatic suddenly crashed thunderously in that narrow room. Out of the corner of his eye Jerry saw a man stagger back through the door he had just entered. Dennis O'Malley howled: "Bad 'cess to you! Come on, you rats, an' get your medicine!"

He dodged toward the door. It slammed. Out on deck voices were raised in loud alarm.

Brisky darted forward after his partner, yelling: "Don't go out there! They'll drill you as soon as you get through the door! Out the other side quick before they get a chance to get over there!" And, turning, the little man bolted to the port door.

JERRY had watched calmly the sudden riot of action he had unloosed; watched while he leisurely cut the two Latin Americans free. Now, as Dennis O'Malley heeded his partner's warning and turned back, Jerry said to him sharply: "I had to round up two of the guards when I got away. One of them offered to split Stanley's money if I'd let him go. He said he'd discovered it and hid it away."

Dennis O'Malley howled with rage. "He couldn't have!"

Jerry shrugged. "That's what he said. Offered to take me right to it. I decided he was lying and locked him up. Didn't have time anyway."

"I'll look as soon as we clean these rats out! And if he's got it he'll beg to give it up before I'm through with him!" The big red-headed Irishman charged the door after his partner.

Brisky was already out on deck. The crashing crescendo of machine-gun fire burst on the night. Crashed in two blasting bursts. There was an interval of si-

lence, and then the machine gun spoke again.

Dennis O'Malley's bull-like bellow begged: "Give it to 'em, Brisky! Cut 'em down!"

Gun in hand, Jerry strolled out on deck after them, smiling faintly to himself. It had worked, and worked well. The matter was on the knees of the gods now.

Brisky plunged into the fire-room fiddley. His machine gun spat a burst. Yelling encouragement, Dennis O'Malley went in after him. Jerry ran along the deck and ducked in the fiddley also. Behind that machine gun was the safest place on the boat. But that wasn't the reason he followed.

He heard Brisky cursing on the other side of the fiddley; heard the rasp of steps somewhere below, descending toward the fire room.

"Is that O'Malley going below?" Jerry called to Brisky.

"Guess so. He told me to watch out up here and he'd be back in a minute."

Jerry used his flash, found the top of the steel ladders and went down them swiftly, calling: "I'm coming, O'Malley! Don't shoot!" But it was doubtful if the big fellow heard him, so excited and intent was he on what he was doing.

O'Malley plunged between the two big boilers of the fire room. Jerry could hear his steps beyond; could hear the machine-gun stutter overhead too. Using his flash in intermittent winks, he slipped between the boilers also. He came out in the lighted engine room where pipes were bolted in a maze to the ceiling, and the great triple-expansion engine towered high. Several bulbs were burning dimly in here. By their light Jerry saw O'Malley's hulking shoulders in a wire cage on the starboard side.

It seemed to be a machinists' store room, for there was a work bench, a rack of tools, shelves and bins holding various

articles in use around an engine room. O'Malley was stooping at the end of the cage, clawing in a pile of waste that had been tossed there. With a loud grunt of satisfaction, O'Malley straightened, pulling out of the waste a familiar leather bag. Stanley's bag!

O'Malley turned with it in his hand as Jerry stepped into the store nook. "Got it, did he?" O'Malley bellowed. "The hell he did! Here it is!"

Jerry lifted his eyebrows. "It seems so," he agreed. "Is the money inside?"

O'Malley frowned, set the bag down on the oily steel plates with a thud, thrust the gun in his hip pocket and opened the bag. It was crammed to the top with the familiar packets of currency.

O'Malley closed the bag. "That bird was lying to you!" he said jubilantly.

"So it seems," Jerry agreed. "And I was lying to you, my friend."

Jerry shoved his gun in O'Malley's middle, smiling grimly.

"Hey, what the hell?" O'Malley's face purpled as his arms rose.

"Turn around!" Jerry directed curtly. "And don't snatch with that hand. I don't want to have to empty this gun in your middle."

O'MALLEY swung around, swearing luridly. Jerry deftly plucked the automatic from his hip pocket and dropped it in his own coat pocket.

"Now stand there," he ordered.

Jerry picked up the bag, backed out of the cage. The stout wire mesh door had a padlock and hasp. Jerry locked the door.

"Our friend Regan was a little crude in his methods," he said casually. "I hope the loss of Stanley's backing will not wreck your plans. Happy revolutions!"

It was awkward business getting the bag up the steep steel ladders, for even currency in sufficient amount has weight. But Jerry made it, and did not mind the effort.

Brisky had left the fiddley. His machine gun fired a burst on the port side of the ship. And then another. Jerry heard the roar of a powerful motor somewhere off-side the ship. It seemed to be heading out into the bay. He stepped out of the fiddley on the starboard side, moved around a still, motionless figure there on the deck, made the gangplank and ran lightly down to the mole. It was deserted once more. The machine gun was firing no more. The speeding motorboat was fast drawing out into the bay. Jerry blended into the shadows at the base of the wrecked grain towers and ran toward his machine.

Daisy Dulane was sitting tense and oblivious on the edge of the seat when Jerry threw the bag into the luggage compartment in the rear and slipped behind the wheel.

"I thought you were killed," she quavered. "What happened?"

"That," said Jerry, "is a little too painful to touch on. But I have an idea some crooks and some killers are doing a lot of hard thinking right now. Where can I let you out? We're going to part this time you know."

"Take me to the Higland Hotel," Daisy Dulane said in a meek, subdued voice.

Jerry turned off the causeway, went toward the downtown district.

"There's a ten-thousand-dollar reward offered for the return of Stanley's money," he said casually.

"What of it?"

Jerry grinned. "I think I'll turn it in and claim the reward. The money's jinxed. I wouldn't have it."

"You talk like a cokie!"

"For ten thousand dollars," said Jerry, "I'd talk like a giraffe."

"A giraffe can't talk."

"Exactly. Honesty," said Jerry gravely, "is the best policy. That's my story and I'll stick to it."

Wrapped for Murder

By
Oscar Schisgall

Author of "The Ratler Clue," etc.



Taggart was aware of nothing until he heard the swish of that descending arm

It was a strange tale of masked danger the girl whispered to Detective Taggart. But stranger still was that night of crimson horror when ghoulish hands snatched her to the brink of the grave.

THE tall, slim girl, tensely bending across the arm of her chair, peered straight into Dan Taggart's astonished eyes. Her gloved hand beat upon her purse, pounding a desperate accompaniment to her words; and while she spoke, her young face paled.

"You've got to help me!" she whispered. "You're the only private detective I know. You've got to come along with me now—today—before it's too late!"

"But look here, Miss Fenwick," he protested, "I—"

"Don't say no, *please!* Don't you see it—it means life or death to me?"

Her very intensity amazed Taggart. For a moment he blinked away, to escape the importunity of her hypnotic blue gaze. He gaped about the Waldorf's lobby without actually seeing it. That she had insisted on meeting him here, in public, instead of coming to his office was incomprehen-

sible. He glanced back at her in perplexity. With that smart little wine-colored hat tilted so rakishly on her chestnut hair, she was quite the loveliest girl he had encountered in years; and the most frightened. . . .

"Will you do it?" she urged.

Taggart looked down at her tiny feet, encased in expensive wine-colored suede, said uncertainly, "Miss Fenwick, I—I'd like to help you. But if you want me to be frank, I honestly don't think I'm the right kind of man to mix in with your crowd. After all I'm just a sort of rough-neck, I guess. I'm plain—"

"Nonsense!" she retorted. "You were good enough to work for my uncle last year."

"That was different."

"Why?"

"Oh, I just made a few simple commercial investigations for him," Taggart muttered, frowning down at his hat. "I didn't have to stick at his side through fancy dinners and teas and dances. I'm afraid I'm not much good as a—society detective."

"Listen!" Diana Fenwick flung out bitterly. "What do you think I came here for? A gigolo? I need a bodyguard! A strong, tough fighter who knows how to use his fists and his gun, and who isn't afraid of trouble! That's you, isn't it?"

He looked up at her incredulously, hardly knowing whether to be pleased or to laugh. "You mean," he demanded, "you want an ordinary muscle man?"

"If that's what you call it, yes! I—I'm apt to be attacked any instant after I step out of this hotel. I've got to have somebody like you along for—protection!"

FOR a while Dan Taggart studied her tense young countenance in wonder. Finally he ventured:

"This is a mighty queer request, com-

ing from the niece of Gregory Fenwick. I don't quite get it. Are you sure you're in danger?"

"Danger?" she repeated fiercely. "Good Lord, do you imagine I'm doing this because of a whim? I tell you somebody is trying to—to *kill* me! He's already made two attempts. I escaped both by sheer luck. But I may not have such luck next time. That's why I want a private detective at my side—armed!"

Taggart suddenly leaned forward, his indecision had vanished.

"Look here, Miss Fenwick," he said curtly. "I want to be mighty sure of my ground before I undertake full responsibility for your life. Start at the beginning and tell me what happened." Then, before she could speak, he added a sharp question: "In the first place, why should anybody be trying to murder you?"

"I—I haven't the faintest idea!"

"For money?"

"I—" she faltered. "I can't say."

"And you don't know who's behind it all?"

"No. I saw him both times. But he wore a mask."

Uttering a curious little sound in his throat, Taggart drew his chair nearer to her. The sheer melodrama in the girl's words had started something to churning in him. He nodded and said, "Go ahead. Let's have the details."

Diana Fenwick sent a swift glance along the length of Peacock Alley. They were alone in this corner, and it seemed safe enough to confide her story in whispers. So she turned back to him abruptly, her eyes glowing.

"He made the first attempt a week ago," she said quickly. "I was riding along a bridle path in the woods, hardly a mile from my uncle's house. It was dusk, and this man, whoever he was, came out of the trees like—like something unreal. He was tall and heavy, and he

wore a long black coat. But the terrifying thing was the black cloth that hid his face. He came straight at me, running. I was too stunned even to move. But my horse bolted. That's what really saved me, I think—the fact that the horse reared and dashed away from him in terror."

The girl paused, holding her breath. Taggart made no effort to interrupt. Eyes narrowed under contracting brows, he watched her intently.

"THE second attempt came yesterday," Diana Fenwick rushed on, her eyes snapping in excitement. "I was driving any roadster from Poughkeepsie, where I'd spent the afternoon, back to my uncle's place. I took a short-cut along a narrow side-road. I was going quite fast when a huge rock tumbled down an embankment ahead of me. It crashed into the road, and I had to jam on the brakes. The instant I stopped I saw the strange masked man again! He was coming down the embankment toward me. But my luck was still—miraculous. At that moment another car came whizzing around the bend behind me. The masked man saw it, and he turned and ran away. Just disappeared in the woods!

"It was this second experience that made me decide to come to you, Mr. Taggart. I—I need somebody who isn't afraid to grapple with that man and hold him when he tries again!"

Dan Taggart scarcely knew what to reply. Fantastic as the account sounded, he felt the girl was not exaggerating any of its lurid details. She had no reason to exaggerate. He asked:

"Does you uncle know about all this?"

"No! Of course not."

"Why 'of course'?"

"He—he's very ill," she said softly. "Bedridden for weeks. You've heard, perhaps?"

Taggart nodded. And suddenly, as the girl swung her head away from him, he

was amazed to see the mistiness of tears surge into her eyes. A hint of actual anguish quivered about her lips. When she spoke again, her low voice thickened, almost choked.

"The doctors say it may be the—the end for him. He's got to be kept calm. I—I don't want you to worry him about my troubles at a time like this. Don't you see? If he knew what was happening, it might—"

Dan Taggart understood. Nevertheless he felt vaguely dissatisfied by the explanation, and he pressed earnestly: "Why don't you go to the police, Miss Fenwick, instead of to me?"

"Police mean publicity."

"What of it?"

"Uncle still has the papers read to him; he's apt to—Oh, I don't want the police dragged into this!" she suddenly cried. "Not until I understand what it's all about! I don't even want anybody to know I'm employing a detective. That's why I asked you to meet me here—so that even my chauffeur wouldn't know I'd gone to your agency. The news would circulate among the servants. Uncle would eventually learn of it."

Despite his grave nod, Taggart still suspected she was for some reason withholding her real reason for avoiding the police. He did not, however, harp on the point. Instead he considered a few moments, then abruptly rose. One of his rare, dazzling smiles burst upon the girl.

"All right," he announced. "I'm hired."

An instant Diana Fenwick gaped at him, perhaps taken aback by his bluntness. Then her smile outshone his. Her slim, gloved hand darted out to seize his fingers in a firm compact.

"Thanks," she whispered. "I'm glad!"

"I'm going to start by dragging you off to dinner," he said with a glance at his wrist-watch. "It's six-thirty. We'll go to Edouard's, if you don't mind—a

little place next door to my apartment. After that you can give me fifteen minutes to throw some clothes in a bag, and I'll drive out to your uncle's house with you. We ought to make it by about ten thirty. If your masked friend wants to make another attempt very soon, we'll be ready for him."

"You're not afraid?"

"On the contrary," he assured her. "I'm thrilled by the anticipation!"

THE Fenwick town car—a sixteen-cylinder bit of glistening splendor with a black-uniformed chauffeur at the wheel—picked them up at the Park Avenue entrance. They drove to Edouard's in silence, Taggart feasting on the fragrance that enveloped the girl. In the deepening twilight he studied her profile; and the longer he peered at her, the more pleased he became with his decision to undertake a job at her side.

At Edouard's the chauffeur, opening the door for them, stood as rigid as a cadet on parade. Taggart knew the man was appraising him curiously, if furtively; perhaps wondering what sort of companion Miss Fenwick had found at the Waldorf. He was a handsome enough fellow, as dark and lean as an Arab; and his manner was beyond criticism.

The girl said: "Draper, you'd better have your dinner now. We won't be starting for Poughkeepsie before half-past seven, and we'll go straight through."

He touched his cap, said: "Thank you, miss!" and clicked the door of the car shut. Taggart, accompanying Diana Fenwick into the familiar restaurant, felt as though every stare, including the chauffeur's, were fastened on him in surprise.

But he had scant time to think of himself.

As soon as the waiter had turned away with their order, she reverted anxiously to the matter of her assailant.

"Just what are we going to do?" she asked. "Wait until he makes another attempt?"

"Oh, no," Taggart grimly answered. "We're going to try to identify him from what we already know. We're going to try to prevent a third attack."

"But how?"

"Well, let's try to figure this thing out sensibly," he said. "Suppose we analyze what's happened. In the first place, who on earth would have any cause to make such attacks on you? Who'd have anything to gain?"

"I wish I knew!" bitterly.

"No idea at all?"

She hesitated, stabbing a queer glance at him through her lashes; then slowly shook her golden head. "None at all."

For a moment Taggart sat silent, toying with his fork, then he said quietly:

"Let me get this straight. Your uncle, Gregory Fenwick, has no children, has he? And no wife."

"No-o," she admitted.

"Does that mean you're going to be the sole inheritor of his fifteen or twenty millions?"

It was as if he had placed his finger on a wound. Diana Fenwick stiffened and lost a little color. With her eyes fixed steadily on his, she let a long interval of stillness pass before she softly inquired:

"Do you really suspect that may have anything to do with these attacks?"

"I'm not suspecting Miss Fenwick. I'm asking."

She said, with restraint in every syllable: "As a matter of fact, I'm not the sole heir. Of course, I've been brought up by my uncle since I was a child of four. And I know he's leaving the bulk of his money to me. But he's already told me that twenty-five percent of it will go to Maxwell Sherry."

Taggart instantly leaned forward. His

eyes flashed as he demanded, "Who's he?"

"My cousin. Uncle Gregory's nephew."

"Never heard of him."

"No, you scarcely would, through Uncle," she said drily. "He and Maxwell never got along any too well. They seldom even saw each other. But Uncle feels that for the sake of family prestige and to avoid a scandal he doesn't care to leave Maxwell without anything."

Of a sudden, then, Dan Taggart was like a hunting dog catching a new, strong scent. Deep in his stare surged excitement, and he spoke tensely.

"Are you and Maxwell Sherry the only relatives of Gregory Fenwick?"

"Yes-es."

"So that, if anything happened to you, Sherry would be the only surviving heir to the entire fortune! . . . I get it now, Miss Fenwick. I get the whole picture!"

She was quite pale as she challenged, "What—what do you mean?"

"You've been suspecting Maxwell Sherry yourself. You've been thinking, fearing, he may be behind these attacks. That's why you didn't go to the police. You don't want a situation like that to become public. You don't want your uncle to suspect his nephew may be mixed up in an ugly business of this sort. As a matter of fact, you hesitated to put your notion into words even with me."

He knew he had struck the truth. Diana Fenwick, biting her lip, was frowning down at her glass. She offered no reply, yet it was evident enough that her suspicions of her cousin were torturing her.

Dan Taggart was about to add something else. Seeing the waiter approach with a heavy-laden tray, however, he straightened. His face was grim. He remained silent until they had been served. Then he looked levelly at the girl and told her:

"Our ideas don't make Maxwell Sherry guilty. We may be far off the track, and I hope to heaven we are. I can well appreciate what the shock of a blow like that would do to your uncle just now. All the same, we've got to play safe. Where does this cousin of yours live?"

"Here in New York," she whispered.

"He's staying at the Traveller's Club."

"All right," Taggart said briskly. "After dinner I'll phone Harrington—he's the young fellow who works for me. I'll have Harrington watch Sherry; trail him every minute."

"But Mr. Taggart!" she began.

"Merely a matter of thoroughness and precaution," he assured her. "We can't afford to overlook a single trick, when your life's in danger. . . . Now suppose we forget it for a while and eat. We'd better enjoy a calm meal while we can. I—I have a feeling there's plenty of excitement ahead for us!"

He was right.

THE excitement struck them, however, much sooner than he had expected; and it came with the devastating suddenness of an explosion, when they were least prepared for it.

Fred Draper, the chauffeur, drove them to the Fenwick estate near Poughkeepsie at high speed. The roads were quite clear, and he approached the place at a few minutes after ten, his headlights blazing between two rows of trees.

Half a minute before the shock the sleek black car slid to a stop outside a pair of huge, baronial gates. They were closed and apparently locked. Draper, slipping out of his seat, took a bunch of keys from his pocket. As he advanced, the headlights glared full upon his trim figure. He unlocked the gates and, bending his weight against them, laboriously pushed them open. They creaked and ground on their hinges, but at last were

out of the way. Adjusting his cap, Draper came back to his seat behind the wheel.

And then—

Dan Taggart heard no sound of warning; saw not even a shadow to make him dodge.

Without the faintest noise a man, emerging from bushes, stepped to the side of the car—a tall man whose face was concealed by a black cloth. . . . His arm was raised high, holding up something that glinted. The window beside Taggart was open, but he was aware of nothing until he heard the swish of that descending arm. By that time it was too late.

Steel crashed horribly on the side of Taggart's head!

He gasped. Convulsively he wrenched himself off the seat, his eyes bulging and his face distorted in agony. He spun dizzily on his heels, while a million explosive lights seemed to burst before him like rockets. Then the lights vanished. He uttered a groan—and crumpled weakly to the floor of the car in utter blackness. The last thing he heard was a thin, high sound like a distant scream. . . .

DAN TAGGART must have lain there, unconscious, for some fifteen minutes. When he finally stirred, painfully blinking himself back to his senses, he pushed his bulk up on his hands and knees. His head lolled, throbbing with a dreadful ache. Mechanically he lifted unsteady fingers to a spot above his right ear and encountered a large, sticky welt.

Then, suddenly, he remembered Diana Fenwick.

The memory of the girl brought his wits rushing back in an overwhelming stampede. Eyes afire, hands groping for support, he forced himself dizzily to his feet—and caught his breath on a gasp of horror.

She was gone!

The door of the car swung open, and there was no sign of Diana Fenwick!

But Fred Draper, the chauffeur, was still there. He hung limply over the steering wheel, his cap missing, his arms dangling almost to the floor. . . .

No, he wasn't dead. Taggart could hear the man's sibilant breaths. He groped around with a shaking hand until he found a switch; and turned on the car's ceiling-light. The sudden glare momentarily dazzled him. But his vision quickly cleared.

In the center of the chauffeur's forehead he saw an ugly, bloody bruise. Staring at it, Dan Taggart grated an oath. He seized the man's shoulders, pulled him back in the seat.

"Draper!" he called hoarsely. "Draper!" And he shook the fellow with unintentioned violence until Draper opened bewildered eyes and caught wildly at the wheel.

"Wh-what the hell!" he gasped.

"Steady!" rasped Taggart. "You're all right."

"Wh-what happened?" thickly.

"Miss Fenwick's gone!"

"What!"

"Save it," Taggart ordered. "Get your breath back and tell me what you saw!" Draper awkwardly sat up, stunned.

"I—I didn't see anything!" he blurted huskily. "I heard that crack behind me, and then Miss Fenwick screamed. I looked around j-just in time to see you drop, and somebody with a—a mask was reaching into the car! Then there was a sound at my elbow. I started to turn, and a hammer seemed to bang down on my head. Th-that's all I know!"

"So there were two of them?"

"Two? A hundred, maybe! I d-don't know!"

Taggart suddenly felt stronger. His very fury lent him strength. He stumbled out of the car. Clinging to the door,

he stared about with bloodshot eyes. His hat had fallen off, and his thin hair waved crazily in the night breeze. But that wind served also to sweep confusion out of his senses.

He told himself savagely that Diana Fenwick wasn't dead. She couldn't be dead. If she had been deliberately murdered, she would have been left lying here. The fact that she had been carried away argued that she was still alive. Stubbornly his brain refused to concede anything else. She'd been abducted.

But why?

He looked down for some possible hint of footprints. The car stood on a concrete road, however, and his hope collapsed. "A fine bodyguard I turned out to be!" he thought desperately. "Let them take her right out of my hands—with my eyes open!"

But recriminations were useless. He wasn't making any progress, just standing here and reviling himself. The thing to do was to find Diana Fenwick!

Dan Taggart swung around to face Draper, who was gingerly touching a handkerchief to his forehead. "You strong enough to drive to the house?" he demanded.

"I—I guess so—"

"Then step on it!"

TAGGART sprang into the car. He sat glaring, his face as hard as granite, while Draper sent the automobile whizzing along a gravelled road to the Georgian residence of Gregory Fenwick. When the car skidded to a stop in front of the door, Taggart jumped out and snapped:

"Stick around, Draper! I may need you in a hurry."

"Y-yes, sir! I'll just run around the back to wash this cut."

Taggart hurried toward the door, and it opened suddenly, as if tended by a jinnee. The jinnee, however, proved to

be the rotund Fenwick butler, Leeds. The unexpected sight of Taggart whom he recognized instantly as the detective who had served his master must have dumfounded the butler, for—quite abandoning his usual frigid reserve—he ejaculated an incredulous: "Mr. Taggart!"

"Right!" Taggart rapped out. "And don't start asking too many questions now, Leeds! No time. I want your phone. Miss Fenwick has been kidnaped."

"I—I know it, sir!" gasped Leeds.

"Eh?" Dan Taggart halted abruptly on the threshold, repeated. "You know it?"

"Y-yes, sir! Somebody, some foreigner, just telephoned—refusing to give a name, sir—and told me Mr. Fenwick would have to pay a ransom of one hundred thousand dollars for his niece's safe return!

"It—it will have to be paid tomorrow night, sir, or Miss Fenwick will be k-killed!"

FOR TEN breathless seconds Dan Taggart stood utterly motionless, staring at the butler. So that was it. The attacks on Diana Fenwick hadn't been actual murder attempts at all. They had been efforts to kidnap her for ransom. She was probably alive, being held captive—But if the ransom money was not paid by tomorrow night. . . .

"Your head, sir!" Leeds was exclaiming in dismay. "It's bruised and bloody—"

"The devil with my head!" Taggart rasped. "I'm all right. Tell me about this phone call. When did you get it?"

"Just—just a few moments ago, sir! In fact, as I set down the receiver I heard the car outside, and I hurried to the door to see who—"

"You say it sounded like a foreigner's voice?"

"Yes, sir! Italian, I'd judge."

"What, exactly, did he tell you?"

Leeds shook his bald head desperately. "Not much, sir. Only that Mr. Fenwick was to get a hundred thousand dollars in cash ready by tomorrow afternoon. At that time he would receive another call to instruct him where and how the money was to be delivered. As soon as he'd said that, sir, the man hung up."

Taggart softly cursed. His countenance hard and gray, his eyes burning, he strode past Leeds into the entrance hall. As the butler followed him, he shot out:

"So nobody but yourself knows about this yet, Leeds?"

"No, sir. I haven't had the chance to—"

"Well, keep it to yourself! Don't say a word."

"*Sir?*" in amazement.

"I don't want Mr. Fenwick to have the shock," snapped Taggart. "In his condition it would be fatal."

"But he'll have to be informed in the morning, sir! If he's to have time to raise so much money, sir—"

"He won't have to be told anything, and he won't have to raise any money, if we have luck!" Dan Taggart grated. "If things work out, I'll find Miss Fenwick before morning."

Leeds gaped.

"Now beat it," said Taggart. "Get me some iodine and bandages for my head. I have to do a bit of phoning."

The telephone stood under the stairs, and as Taggart strode to it, his eyes flamed queerly. He had an idea—a strange yet insistently hammering idea; and because it offered his only hope of finding Diana Fenwick, he wanted to act upon it immediately. While the pallid Leeds hurried off, Taggart snatched up the phone, called police headquarters in New York.

When he'd secured the connections, he asked for Captain Walter Magruder of the Missing Persons Bureau. He'd known

Magruder eight years, and he wasn't shy this evening in imposing on that long friendship.

"Hello," a bass voice rapped into his ear. "Captain Magruder talking."

Taggart stiffened with a jerk. "Hello, Walt," he said quickly, tensely. "Dan Taggart calling. I'm calling from Poughkeepsie, and I've got hot news. Gregory Fenwick's niece, Diana, was kidnaped about a half hour ago."

"Wha-at!"

"Listen, Walt. This is out of your province. It happened up here, near Poughkeepsie. But I've got a lead on the case and if think I can find her—if you're willing to give me some help. How about it?"

"Of course. Name it."

"Thanks! It's just this: Will you have one of your boys list every public telephone booth within two blocks of Edouard's Resaurant on Thirty-Eighth, near Lexington? Then get Long Distance to tell you if a call went from any of those booths to a number in or near Poughkeepsie between six thirty and seven thirty tonight. If the answer is yes, I want that number . . ."

"Right!" snapped Captain Magruder. "Where can I reach you in half an hour?"

Taggart read the number on his telephone. As he put the instrument down he invoked a silent blessing on all men like Walt Magruder.

THE HALF hour he was compelled to wait seemed more like half a year to Dan Taggart. Each second produced its torment of anxiety. With Leeds assistance he bathed and dressed the welt above his ear. It still thumped, but he began to forget its pain as he paced nervously up and down the spacious hall.

At last the telephone's bell trilled.

Taggart himself sprang to the in-

strument, eagerly. Yes, it was Captain Magruder calling.

"Got what you wanted, all right, Dan," Magruder announced tersely. "There's a booth in the corner drug store on Thirty-eight from which a call went to Poughkeepsie at 7:10 tonight. It was made to Poughkeepsie 7928. That—"

"Wait!" gasped Taggart. And he snatched a pencil from his vest pocket. "Let me write that down—"

"Write this, too," added Magruder. "I got the rest of the information while I was at it. Poughkeepsie 7928 is the number of Guglielmo Serratti, an Italian grocer, located at 23 Sleet Street. Got it?"

Scribbling furiously on the telephone pad, Taggart fairly yelled into the mouth-piece: "Right, Walt! And thanks, man—thanks! I'm heading for Serratti's joint now?"

"Well, good luck," the captain muttered. "And be careful. I'm in no mood for a funeral. . . ."

"There'll be *two* funerals," Taggart said savagely, "if I don't find that girl tonight! Hers and—and her uncle's, when he learns what happened! So long, Walt! I've got two lives depending on me tonight!"

He smashed down the receiver.

IT WAS a dark, narrow, surly house on a dark, narrow, surly street. Pausing in front of it, Dan Taggart scowled uncertainly up its two-floor height. The grocer's store—its plate-glass bearing the name, Guglielmo Serratti—was closed and lightless, as were all the other windows. The whole house, indeed, looked untenanted. Yet Taggart felt grimly convinced that here he would discover a clue to the whereabouts of Diana Fenwick.

His hand slipped resolutely into his jacket pocket, curled around his gun.

He darted a final, grim glance toward the corner, where the glistening Fenwick

car waited. Then, tight-lipped, he moved into the dark door. Ahead of him, in the blackness, he could vaguely discern a flight of stairs. That they would be rickety, creaking, he guessed easily enough; so he started up with infinite caution, on his toes. And the automatic came out of his pocket

But Taggart mounted only six steps.

Then he heard a sound that halted him, left him quivering. It was a scraping, as of stone against stone; and it came not from the house itself but from somewhere outside.

Tense, holding his breath, Taggart descended again. In the hall he ventured to strike a match. Its yellow flare, quite dazzling in the darkness, revealed a door at the rear of the corridor. It was an open black maw; and as he approached it, with his automatic raised, Taggart saw that it gave upon stone stairs that fell into a cellar. The closer he went to that door, the clearer became the scraping sounds—

He extinguished the match. With all the caution of a prowling cat Dan Taggart went down the cellar stairs. One hand supported him against the wall; the other kept his weapon leveled, ready for trouble.

The cellar, he found, was empty. But a door at its rear, swinging open, framed a narrow view of the back yard. It was from there, he realized with a constriction of every muscle, that the queer sounds were coming!

Taggart crushed his breath. He advanced without a sound, his eyes flaming and his heart filled with thunder. Despite the coolness of the night, perspiration oozed out of his forehead; oozed faster and faster as he approached the door.

And then, suddenly, he saw the thing that almost wrenched a scream from him.

Out there, in the yard, a flagstone fully four feet square had been raised like a trap

door! It was a dumfounding sight, and fantastic—visible evidence of how thoroughly this kidnaping attempt had been prepared. The lifted stone disclosed a deep pit in the ground; and into this pit, patently for concealment, a man was dragging a tightly roped bag!

Taggart's mind gasped, "God!"

For he could guess what that bag contained. Its shape told more than enough. Moreover, a woman's slipper had fallen out of it—a tiny wine-colored slipper. He needed no greater evidence.

Diana Fenwick must be bound up in that sack!

TAGGART'S automatic rose. His blazing eyes swung to the man who was dragging the bag toward the hole. A heavy figure, almost bald, with the swarthy features of a Sicilian. Gugliemo Serratti! Dan Taggart suddenly sprang forward and lashed out a furious:

"Stick 'em up!"

The bald man gasped. He whirled around, and his huge face became ghastly.

"Up with those hands!" hoarsely raged Taggart.

Had the Italian obeyed, that might have been the end of the encounter. But he didn't obey. Perhaps panic seized him!—Or madness. Whatever it was, he emitted a roar. Before Taggart quite realized his intentions, a revolver was jerked out of the man's pocket. It rose quickly—

Taggart fired.

And at that same instant two other shots cracked through the stillness of the back yard!

"What the devil!" gasped Taggart, stunned.

The heavy Italian stiffened. An expression of bewilderment rather than of pain swept over his massive features. He looked around dazedly, while his gun

slipped out of bleeding fingers. Another crimson rivulet was already starting from his ribs. With an incredulous oath dying on his lips he sank down slowly, slowly, in an unconscious heap. . . .

Taggart was staring around the yard, and his eyes actually protruded. For half a dozen policemen, yelling like madmen, were scrambling over surrounding fences! More of them were pouring out of the cellar door!

"Magruder's work!" thought Taggart.

It was clear as crystal. Captain Walter Magruder, never the idle kind, must have notified the Poughkeepsie police to raid this address for kidnapers!

Taggart dashed to the bag. He fell to his knees beside it, and his hands trembled violently as he began to tear at the ropes. Dead? Would he find Diana Fenwick's corpse wrapped in this burlap? His whole body was suddenly wet with perspiration, and an unspoken prayer seethed in his mind. He couldn't talk to the policemen. He couldn't do anything save rip at the ropes.

And then, coming from within the sack, he caught a faint sound—a moan. . . .

Alive! She was alive!

His fingers worked more furiously than ever. His brain cried, "Thank God!" in a kind of groan. Then he realized a policeman was hurling questions into his ear. Without looking up, Taggart flung back:

"No, Serratti there is only *one* of the kidnapers! The other is at the Fenwick house. I ran off with his car. He's the chauffeur—Fred Draper!"

"GET this, Walt!" Taggart snapped two hours later, when he telephoned Captain Magruder from the Fenwick house. He stood in the drawing room, his eyes fastened on Diana Fenwick. Resting on a settee, she smiled at

him wearily; and though he responded, his words went to the Captain: "Both Serratti and Draper are under arrest. Serratti, it turns out, was the masked man who made the other attempts. But Draper, the chauffeur, must have been the brains of the scheme. He always informed Serratti where Miss Fenwick would be riding. I'm glad as the devil that Maxwell Sherry wasn't in on this! A blow like that might have killed old man Fenwick. We thought for a time—"

"Look here, Dan," the captain interrupted. "What in thunder made you suspect Draper in the first place?"

"The pupils of his eyes."

"Wha-at?"

"Don't yell at me," Taggart snapped. "I said the pupils of his eyes. When I regained consciousness in the car tonight, Draper lay, apparently unconscious, beside me. I brought him to. When he opened his eyes, they were bright and staring. Now, you know as well as I do, Walt, that when a man recovers from coma his eyes are blank and unfocussed. The pupils are large. Draper's weren't like that at all. They were perfectly nor-

mal. That's what made me think maybe he was pretending. And it turns out I was right. He tried to help Serratti grab Miss Fenwick in the car, and she hit him with her purse. Its lock bruised his forehead. He took advantage of the welt and pretended he'd been knocked out by some other assailant. He had to stay with me, of course, to make himself look innocent."

"But—"

"Wait! Let me finish," Taggart pleaded. "Once I suspected Draper, I realized he was the only one in a position to know what time our car would reach the Fenwick estate. Knowing that, he could have notified an accomplice near Poughkeepsie. That's why I asked you to investigate those telephone calls. I figured he'd have phoned while we were having dinner. . . . Now, if you'll excuse me, Walt, I've got business to attend to here."

"Business? I thought you're finished!" snapped the captain. "What kind of business now?"

Taggart looked at Diana Fenwick, stretched on the settee, and grinned. "Personal business!" he finished.

FEATURED IN THE DECEMBER 15th ISSUE

The Swinging Corpse

CARROLL JOHN DALY'S

latest complete novel-length Vee Brown thriller

A man was hanging there on the corner of Fifth Avenue and Forty-second Street. His body, that had been held against the lamp post by the force of the wind, was now beginning to swing grotesquely back and forth. And driven almost into the very center of his chest was a huge knife, and held there by that knife was a square of cardboard; cardboard on which, plainly and in large letters, was printed—

It's Got Mystery—It's Got Suspense—It's Got Hair-Raising Action

DIME DETECTIVE for DECEMBER 15th

Out DECEMBER 1st

The "Clue" Story

NOT often does DIME DETECTIVE run a story so completely a "puzzle—" or "clue-type" mystery as was *Winking Death*, Allan Vaughan Elston's thriller which ended on page 72. But we feel, whenever a yarn comes to us containing, as that one did, the various ingredients we want to feature — suspense, thrills, horror, mystery, action, a touch of the macabre — the mere fact that deductive elements are also present in larger quantities than usual should not put the bars up against it.

How about it?

We're inclined to think that the so-called "deductive" story has been more or less maligned lately—possibly because so many of the type are hardly more than synthetically fictionized cross-word puzzles. So when one of them pops up packed with all the punch that *Winking Death* had—

Well—what's the verdict?

Now meet the man responsible for all our dithering. We'll let Mr. Elston speak for himself.

The sad story of my life begins in a survey camp, shifts scene to a cow ranch, goes into a short reel of railroading, cuts back then to a Chilean copper mine, next showing brief close-ups of military barracks followed by tall white stakes in a Florida

swamp, and fades at last into the mysterious mystery of a situation in which friends occasionally refer to me as a writer.

I live in California. Have never seen a magazine editor in the flesh; however, have seen many ex-editors, because after they lose their jobs they always come to California. Every second summer I go as far east as Colorado, begin at the Wyoming line and fish down the continental divide to New Mexico. Then

I cross the divide and fish back up the other timberline to Wyoming. Then home and to bed.

I just returned from a jaunt like that. As I passed Denver going south a couple of writers came out and pitched their tepees next to mine. They'd just been to New York to look the editors over. They told me all about editors, and I was never so surprised in my life.

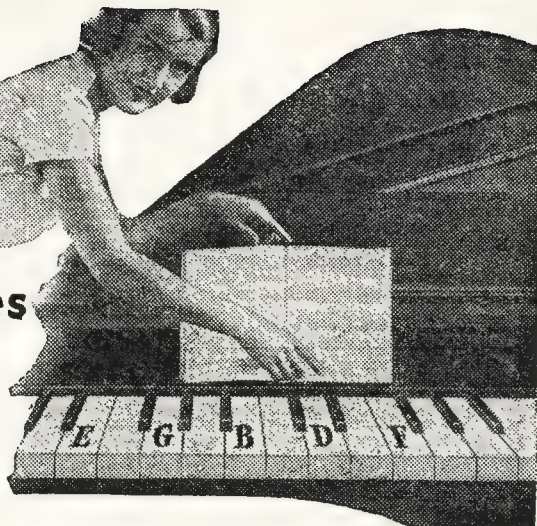
I would put in just what they said about editors, but the boss of this magazine told me to keep under two hundred words. Isn't that just like him?



Allan Vaughan Elston



Every Good Boy Deserves Fun



LOOK!

Easy as A·B·C to learn music this way

JUST see how easy it is! The lines are always E-G-B-D-F. Memorize the sentence, "Every Good Boy Deserves Fun"—and there you are! Whenever a note appears on the first line, you know it is *e*. Whenever a note appears on the second line, you know it is *g*.

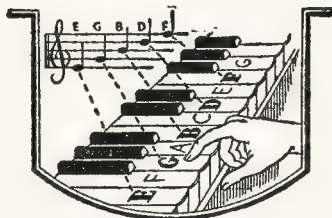
And the spaces—just as easy to remember. The four spaces are always F-A-C-E. That spells "face"—simple enough to remember, isn't it? Thus whenever a note appears in the first space, it is *f*. Whenever a note appears in the second space, it is *a*.

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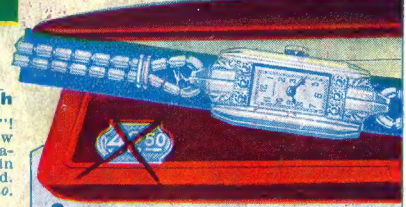
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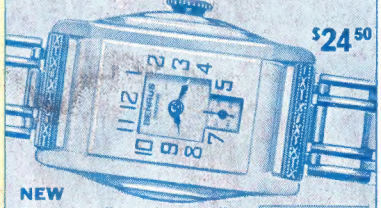
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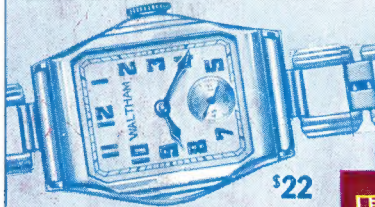


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